

## 10 facts about the NHS workforce

The NHS is the single largest employer in the UK. Although the size of its workforce is rising, the level of growth is not sufficient to meet the increasing demand for healthcare and complexity or level of patient need. Increases in staff numbers are not consistent across roles, and the service faces high numbers of vacancies overall.

The following 10 facts outline the current state of the NHS workforce and look back at trends since 2010.

- 1 In March 2024 the NHS total full-time equivalent (FTE) workforce reached 1.34 million.** This is at an **all-time high** and is 32% larger than March 2010. The size of the workforce remained stable throughout 2010 but began to dip in 2011. It continued to fall, reaching a record low of 963,000 in June 2013. From July 2013 the workforce began to increase and has continued to grow steadily each month, albeit with a small drop in August 2020. Managers and senior managers make up 3% of the NHS workforce, compared to an average of around 11% across the wider workforce in England.
- 2 Increases in the size of the NHS workforce have not been consistent across job roles.** The number of doctors has increased by 47% since March 2010, while the number of nurses and health visitors has increased by 26%, and ambulance staff have risen by 14%. This is also the case for non-clinical roles. The number of hotel, property and estates staff has grown by 16% in this time; for managers and senior managers this figure is 10%, dropping to 1% growth when looking at managers only.
- 3 Demand has continued to outpace the growth in NHS staff numbers over the last 10 years and in March 2024, there were still over 101,000 vacancies across the NHS.** The number of vacancies is the difference between FTE permanent or fixed-term staff in post and planned workforce levels. Some vacant posts are filled by agency or temporary staff but are still considered as vacancies. The number of vacancies has been decreasing steadily in recent months and, in the latest data was at its lowest since June 2021. NHS vacancies reached an all-time high of 132,000 in September 2022, along with the highest vacancy rate of 9.6%. London has consistently had the highest vacancy rate since 2019/20. In March 2024, the London vacancy rate stood at 9.2%. In comparison, The South West, North East and Yorkshire regions, have had the lowest since 2018/19, with the March 2024 vacancy rate at 5% and 5.5%, respectively.

- 4 The NHS workforce in England is predominantly female and there has been a continued increased in the overall diversity of the workforce:**
- a** Around three quarters (76%) of the NHS workforce are female as of March 2024.
  - b** 89% identify as heterosexual or straight, 3% identify as gay or lesbian, 2% identify as bisexual, and 1% identify as 'other', while 6% would 'prefer not to say'.
  - c** In March 2024 the proportion of white staff was 67%. Other ethnic groups include Asian or Asian British (14%), Black or Black British (8%), Mixed (2%), and Chinese (1%). The proportion of staff whose ethnicity was not stated or unknown was 3% and 1%, respectively. Ethnic minority staff are more likely to be in lower banded roles: the 2023 workforce race equality standard (WRES), which gives more information on ethnicity at different pay bands, reported that ethnic minority representation reduces at higher bands, with the largest representation at Agenda for Change (AfC) band 5 (38.5%) and the lowest at AfC band 9 (11.2%).
  - d** The NHS workforce statistics show 6% of staff identify as disabled in March 2024. Although, this could be an underestimate, as **research suggests** nearly half of disabled people worry about sharing this information at work. In March, 9% of staff did not disclose disability information and 5% reported their disability status as unknown.
  - e** NHS staff survey results show a quarter of staff (25%) report having a mental health condition or illness lasting, or expected to last 12 months or more.
  - f** In March 2024, around one in five (21%) were over 55 years old. Close to half (48%) of staff were between 35 to 54 years old. 30% of staff were aged under 35 years old.
- 5 NHS workforce statistics covering the self-reported nationality of staff show that in March 2024 79% of the workforce reported British nationality, while 5% were EU/EEA nationals, and 15% reported nationality from the rest of the world.** In 2022-23, there were 25,006 internationally educated joiners to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register, a 6.8% rise from the year before. Prior to 2016-17, the number of international joiners to the NMC register was higher from EU countries than overseas. However, since the UK left the EU, the number of international joiners from European countries has declined and those from countries outside Europe has increased. In 2022-23, of the international joiners, more than four in five were educated outside Europe. In 2022, international medical graduates made up 52% of new additions to the General Medical Council (GMC) register, up from 50% in 2021.
- 6 In the year ending March 2024, the annual joiners rate – the number of joiners divided by the average number of staff over the year - was 15.1%.** This is above levels seen in the year ending

March 2011, when the joiners rate was 9.3%. Since then, it has grown steadily, although with a slight dip in 2021 and 2022.

- 7 In the year ending March 2024, the annual leavers rate, which refers to the number of leavers divided by the average number of staff over the year, was 10.2%.** The leavers rate rose from 10.2% in 2011 to a peak of 12.0% in 2014 and remained broadly stable over the next few years. It started to gradually decrease in 2019 and 2020 and then dropped to a record low of 9.2% in March 2021, during the pandemic. Since then, it increased to close to 12% in 2022 and 2023, before dropping back this year. Voluntary resignations accounted for 57% of NHS leavers in the quarter ending March 2024. The reason for leaving was other/not known in a quarter (25%) of voluntary resignations. Other common reasons for voluntary resignation were relocation (20%) and work life balance (19%).
- 8 The NHS sickness absence rate was 5.1% in February 2024.** This is up by 0.7 percentage points from February 2010 (4.4%). Between January 2010 and February 2020, the sickness absence rate fluctuated across the seasons between a 4-5% rate. At the start of the Covid pandemic in March 2020, it rose to 5.4% and continued to rise to 6.2% in April 2020; the seasonal trend continued but with higher peaks in the winter. Sickness absence rates remained above 5% for the whole of 2022 (except for one month), and in 2023 rates returned to the seasonal pattern, although with higher peaks than pre-Covid. Ambulance staff consistently report higher sickness absence rates than other clinical staff groups. In February 2024, this was 6.3%, compared to 5.4% for nurses and health visitors, and 2% for doctors. Anxiety/stress/depression/other psychiatric illnesses remain the most reported reason for sickness for all NHS staff. In February 2024, this accounted for over 545,141 full time equivalent days lost and 25.8% of all sickness absence.
- 9 Large proportions of staff reported experiencing burnout.** 43% of staff are often or always worn out at the end of their shift (2022: 46%, 2021: 47%), and 30% feel burnt out because of their work (2022: 34%, 2021: 35%). The measure related to burnout increases to 39% for ambulance staff. The 2023 NHS staff survey results also revealed that staff are unsatisfied with their level of pay and the number of staff in their organisation: 31% of staff are satisfied or very satisfied with their level of pay (up from 26% last year but below pre-pandemic levels of 38% in 2019), and 32% think their organisation has enough staff for them to do their job properly (up from 26% last year and similar to pre-pandemic: 32.2% in 2019).
- 10 Large proportions of staff reported experiencing at least one incident of harassment, bullying or abuse from patients/service users, their relatives or other members of the public (25%, down from**

28% last year and 29% pre-pandemic), from managers (10%, down from 11% last year and 12% in 2019), or from other colleagues (18%, down from 19% last year and 19% in 2019). Furthermore, 9% of staff said they had been the target of at least one incident of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature in the workplace from patients/service users, their relatives or other members of the public, and 4% said they had experienced this from staff/colleagues; 2023 was the first year this question was asked.

The NHS workforce continues to grow, but it is faced with ongoing recruitment and retention issues, evidenced by high vacancy rates and dissatisfied staff.

At a local level, trust leaders continue to work hard to support their staff, but action is also needed at a national level to ensure that the health and care system has the right number of staff with the right skills, to tackle existing longstanding challenges and to nurture a thriving health and care workforce for the future.

We outline this commitment on workforce and four other commitments on health inequalities, funding and infrastructure, culture and safety, and care in the right place at the right time in our [briefing on delivering the next generation NHS](#).