

# Leavers' survey 2020

Why do people leave the NMC register?



# Summary

## Since 2017, we have been running an annual survey to understand why people leave our permanent register.

Just under 21,800 nurses, midwives and nursing associates left the NMC's permanent register between July 2019 and June 2020.

Between December 2020 and January 2021, we asked a sample of 14,996 of these people to tell us why they left the register. In total, 5,639 people responded (a response rate of 37.6 percent).

The three most commonly selected reasons for leaving the register were the same as in previous years: retirement, personal circumstances and too much pressure.

We included two new response options this year. One was around **workplace culture**. This was the fourth most frequently selected option, and there were also over 600 comments on this theme (around 29 percent of all comments). The other was around the **Covid-19 pandemic**. Less than a fifth of respondents had left after the onset of the pandemic; of those that had, around 14 percent said that the pandemic had influenced their decision to leave the register.

As with previous years, reasons for leaving differed between groups.

- People trained in the UK were older and many said they were retiring. Those who had trained in the EU were younger and many said they were 'leaving or had left the UK' or cited Brexit as a reason for leaving. People who had trained outside the EU and the UK also said they were 'leaving or had left the UK', but around a third said they were retiring.
- Older groups most frequently left because they were retiring, there was too much pressure and due to negative workplace cultures. Younger groups most frequently left because they were leaving the UK, Brexit and poor pay and benefits.
- People who had worked in midwifery, and in mental health, were more likely to cite 'too much pressure' and 'workplace culture' than other job roles. Leaving the UK was more likely to be cited by those who worked in general practice nursing and adult and general nursing.
- People who worked in the NHS were more likely to say they were retiring, and appeared to be retiring at an earlier age than those who had worked outside the NHS. NHS workers were also more likely to cite too much pressure, workplace culture, staffing and disillusionment with the quality of care. People who had worked outside the NHS were more likely to cite concerns about meeting the revalidation requirements.

# Background

Since 2017, we have been running an annual survey to understand why people leave our register. This report presents findings from the latest survey which ran from December 2020 to January 2021.

The report is divided into three sections:

- Section 1** describes the people who responded to our survey, including their demographic characteristics and the settings in which they used to work.
- Section 2** outlines the reasons people selected for leaving the register.
- Section 3** gives an overview of the differences in reasons for leaving between different groups of respondents. This includes differences by where people had trained; how old they are; the UK country that people had worked in; the type of job they had done and whether they had worked in the NHS.

More information about our approach, including how the sample of people invited to take part was selected and subsequently analysed, is provided in **Annexe 1**.



# Section 1

## The people who responded to our survey

### Just under 21,800 nurses, midwives and nursing associates left our register between July 2019 and June 2020.

We contacted around 69 percent of these (14,996 people) and invited them to take part in our survey. In total, 5,639 people responded, which is a response rate of 37.6 percent. This is a statistically valid sample size.

- Most respondents had trained in the UK (90.7 percent, equivalent to 5,112 respondents). The remainder had trained outside the UK: 6.1 percent (342 respondents) had trained in the EU and 3.3 percent (185 respondents) outside of the EU.
- Respondents were broadly similar to the proportions on our register as a whole in terms of which UK country they had worked prior to leaving the register or whether they had worked in or outside of the EU.<sup>1</sup>
- Most respondents were women (90.3 percent or 5,090 people), and were aged 51 years and above (80.2 percent or 4,524 people). We know that the gender profile of people on the register is similar to this, with 89.2 percent of people on the register in March 2021 identifying as female. The age profile of these leavers is older than those on the register, as we might expect, due to the numbers of people leaving due to retirement. In March 2021, 35.1 percent of people on the register were aged 51 and above.
- Nearly one in 10 (9.8 percent or 550 people) identified as being disabled.
- Most respondents were White British (82.9 percent or 4,673 people). There were smaller proportions who were Any other White background (6.8 percent or 386 people); White Irish (2.6 percent or 146 people); Black Caribbean (one percent or 57 people); Black African (0.9 percent or 50 people); and Asian Indian (0.9 percent or 49 people). Other ethnic groups were also represented in smaller numbers. It appears that people in BME groups are underrepresented in our survey respondents, compared to people leaving the register in September 2020. At that point, 83.8 percent of people leaving the register identified as being in one of the White groups, and 15.2 percent were in one of the BME groups.
- The majority of respondents had been nurses (91.3 percent or 5,147)<sup>2</sup>. Just over half of people had worked in adult and general care nursing (52.3 percent or 2,947 people). There were smaller proportions in mental health nursing (10.4 percent or 585 people); general practice nursing (9.4 percent or 532 people); midwifery (6.6 percent or 372 people); and children's and neonatal nursing (6.3 percent or 355 people). Other scopes of practice were also represented in smaller numbers.

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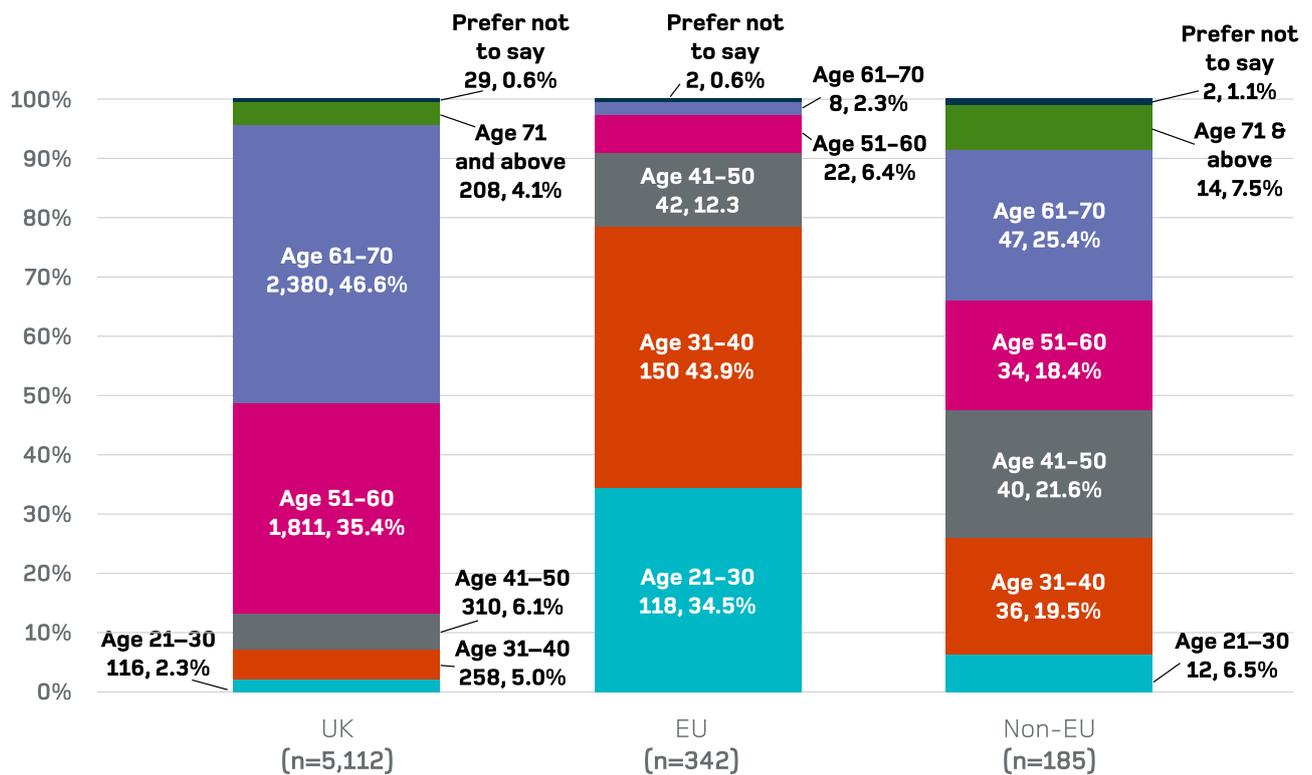
1 The latest [report on people joining, leaving and currently on the register](#) can be found on our website. This includes information on country of training and protected characteristics, such as age.

2 People were able to select as many registration types as applied to them (for example 'Nurse' and 'Midwife'). 403 or 7.1 percent of respondents had been midwives; 218 or 3.9 percent had been registered as Specialist Community Public Health nurses (SCPHNs); and just 12 or 0.2 percent had been registered as nursing associates.

The age profile of people who had trained in the UK, EU and outside of the EU differed (see Figure 1). Respondents who had trained in the UK were older (86.1 percent or 4,399 people were aged 51 years and over). Those who had trained in the EU were the youngest (78.4 percent or 268 people were aged between 21 and 40 years).

Respondents who had trained outside of the EU fell somewhere in between. Just over a quarter of leavers from outside the EU (26 percent or 48 people) were aged 21–40, and just over half (51.3 percent or 95 people) aged 51 years and over. This is similar to what we have seen in previous surveys.

**Figure 1**  
**Age group of respondents by where they trained**



## Section 2

### The reasons people left the register

**We asked respondents to select their top three reasons for leaving the register from a list of 21 response options. Most of these options were the same as in last year's survey, with two additional choices:**

- The workplace culture was having a negative effect on me (e.g. bullying, poor management, difficulty raising concerns).
- The Covid-19 pandemic affected my decision to leave.

People were asked to select their first, second or third choice of reason. As respondents were asked to select up to three reasons for leaving, the total number of reasons selected is greater than the number of respondents.

Table 1 outlines the number of people who selected each reason for leaving from the 21 response options in order of frequency. We received a larger proportion of responses from people who had trained in the UK, compared to their proportion in the population of people who had left the register during July 2019 to June 2020. To prevent this from skewing our results, we gave more weight, or significance, to responses from people who trained in the EU and outside of it. Likewise, we received a smaller proportion of responses from younger people, compared to their proportion in the population of people who had left the register during this period. Therefore, responses have also been weighted to give more significance to responses from younger people.

This means that the survey data is more representative of the wider group of people who left our register between July 2019 and June 2020 (see **Annexe 1**). All figures in the report refer to weighted numbers and percentages, unless otherwise stated.

**Table 1**

**Reasons for leaving: all respondents**

Reason	Number of respondents citing this as one of their top three reasons for leaving	Percentage of respondents citing this as one of their top three reasons for leaving
I have retired	2,907	51.6%
My personal circumstances changed	1,606	28.5%
Too much pressure (stressful, poor mental health)	1,278	22.7%
The workplace culture was having a negative effect on me	1,022	18.1%
I am leaving or have left the UK	1,003	17.8%
Concerned about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements	780	13.8%
Other	724	12.8%
I was disillusioned by the quality of the care provided to patients	624	11.1%
Staffing levels	609	10.8%
I was concerned about my workload	488	8.7%
Brexit has encouraged me to consider working outside the UK	418	7.4%
I no longer work in healthcare	399	7.1%
Poor pay and benefits	362	6.4%
I still work in healthcare but my role no longer requires NMC registration	291	5.2%
I have not had sufficient opportunity to do continuous professional development	235	4.2%
The work is physically challenging	210	3.7%
Flexible working was not available	201	3.6%
The Covid-19 pandemic affected my decision to leave	131	2.3%
Being a nurse or midwife is not what I expected when I trained	94	1.7%
I have returned to education	77	1.4%
I had difficulty in finding suitable employment	69	1.2%
<b>Total respondents</b>	<b>5,639</b>	

Six of the top seven reasons for leaving are the same as last year's survey, though in a slightly different order.

- As in previous years, the most frequently selected reason for leaving the register is **retirement**. Over half of respondents (51.6 percent) cited this. Given the overall age profile of survey respondents (as shown in Figure 1), this is not surprising.
- More than one in four respondents (28.5 percent) cited a **change in personal circumstances** as a reason for leaving. This was the second most frequent option this year.
- **Too much pressure (stressful, poor mental health)** is the third most frequently cited reason for leaving this year. More than one in five respondents, (22.7 percent) selected this as one of their top three reasons for leaving.
- One of the new response options, about **workplace culture** having a negative effect, is the fourth most frequently selected option overall. Nearly one in five respondents (18.1 percent) cited this as a reason for leaving.

The three options that were then most frequently selected were:

- 'I am leaving or have left the UK.'
- 'I was concerned about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements.'
- 'Other, please provide more details.'



## Retirement

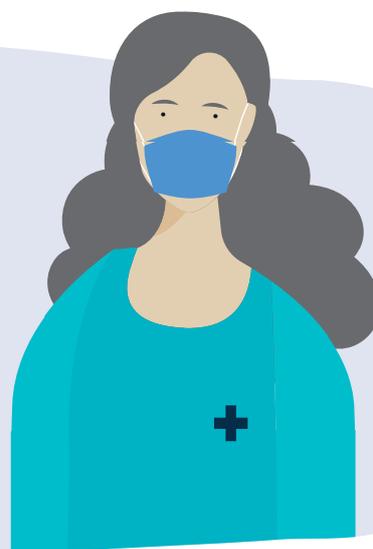
As well as being the most frequently selected reason for leaving the register, about a quarter of people who gave further information in free text comments mentioned retirement (553 people or 26 percent).

About two thirds of these (351, 17 percent of people commenting) said that they had reached the natural end of their career. However, some said that they had retired earlier than they had originally intended.

Some respondents (82 people, 4 percent) said that they had retired because they found their work too physically challenging as they had got older, particularly if they were suffering musculoskeletal problems. Some found that 12-hour shifts were too much, and said that there was little flexibility to work reduced hours.

**“I am now a woman in my 50s and working such long shifts in a continually busy environment became impossibly difficult both physically and mentally. If we had been allowed to continue with the shorter shift patterns, I am sure I would still be working now, there is no consideration for older staff on the wards.”**

Nurse, aged 51–60  
Previously worked in the NHS, England



Others left early because of particular areas of dissatisfaction (70 comments, 3 percent), for example because of heavy workloads, poor management, and not being able to spend enough time with patients.

Some (59 people, 3 percent) left because they wanted to spend more time with family, or pursue outside interests. Smaller numbers said that the work was too mentally challenging; they couldn't keep pace with technology or paperwork; or were in a financial position to retire sooner than they had anticipated.

## Change in personal circumstances

Just under a third of people who provided further comments mentioned changing personal circumstances (29 percent or 621 people).

Most frequently, these people said that their health had deteriorated (352 people, 17 percent). This could be because of a serious physical illness or injury, or a mental health condition, which made working as a nurse or midwife difficult. Sometimes respondents felt that they might have been able to remain on the register if their employer had been more accommodating. Some people (182, 9 percent of those commenting) said that work stress had affected their health.

Others cited caring commitments, for their children (87, 4 percent), and/or partners, parents, grandchildren or other family members (155, 7 percent). Some (36, 2 percent) said that they had moved out of area, or their employer had relocated.

**“Due to having sick leave because I have arthritis and I am waiting for a double knee replacement. My manager was unsupportive and despite the Occupational Health Consultant, [...], recommending reduced hours, as I was working full time, I had my contract terminated. This destroyed me, as nursing was my life. I have since suffered depression and left sided heart failure.”**

Nurse, aged 51–60  
Previously worked in NHS, Wales

## Too much pressure

A fifth of people who provided further comments mentioned too much pressure (429 people, 20 percent). Most comments (340, 16 percent) cited too much pressure or stress without further explanation, or described it as increasing or unrelenting.

Some (182, 9 percent) described how their mental or physical health had deteriorated due to the pressure of work, causing anxiety, depression and conditions such as fibromyalgia.

**“I left the register because I have found working in the NHS so very stressful, with the level of care we want to achieve seeming so unattainable with such staff shortages.... I have come home after shifts feeling very anxious as I felt I haven’t had time to practice safely and give good patient care.”**

Nurse aged 31–40  
Previously worked in the NHS, Scotland

A smaller number (47, 2 percent) left because they lost confidence in their ability to do a satisfactory job. For example, some felt they could not cope with the high levels of responsibility, or they were not given sufficient support from management.

## Workplace culture

About three in ten (611 people, 29 percent) cited the culture of their workplace as a reason to leave. This could be problems with employers, organisational policies, managers or colleagues.

Most commonly, people felt that their manager was unsupportive (301 comments, 14 percent), over-demanding or unreasonable, for example in not addressing stress or workload pressures.

Organisational culture was mentioned in around one in 11 comments (190 comments, 9 percent). Respondents often reported organisations with bullying or blame cultures, or policies not conducive to a safe or harmonious working environment. Most comments were about people's employer, but some were about the policies of government or the NHS, or the NMC.

**“Because of poor management from unqualified, uncaring and bullying managers, nurses with responsibility for direct patient care are left feeling utterly helpless, undermined and dismayed. Best practice is simply not possible due to managers directing resources inappropriately. Myself and many colleagues are left feeling totally helpless.”**

Nurse, aged between 51–60  
Previously worked in the NHS, England



Direct experiences of bullying or harassment (121 comments, 6 percent) caused some people to leave nursing or midwifery. Most commonly, bullying or harassment came from managers, but sometimes this was from other colleagues, or the wider organisation. Bullying was mentioned more frequently by people with disabilities (9.8 percent, 24 of 244) than people without a disability (4.9 percent, 88 of 1,807).

Some left because their concerns were not addressed when voiced, such as untenable working conditions, poor quality of care or concerns about other staff.

Experiences of direct or indirect racism or perceived discrimination were raised by some people (61 comments, 3 percent of those commenting), such as people in older or BME groups being passed over for promotion. There were also more overt racist or ageist behaviour or remarks reported by respondents.



**“The last placement I worked in ... the racism and bullying started from a Nurse and her friend a carer, this bullying and racism escalated to include a type of gang bullying and/or isolation from other members of staff who took on the side of the racists.”**

Nurse, aged 51–60  
Previously worked in the NHS, England

## Other comments made by respondents

As well as the themes above, people also made detailed comments on the following issues:

- workload concerns (302 comments or 14 percent)
- disillusionment with quality of care (293 comments or 14 percent)
- revalidation concerns (280 comments or 13 percent).

### Workload concerns

About one in seven (302, 14 percent) of the free text comments cited workload as a reason for leaving the register.

Around half of these people (147 comments, 7 percent) directly said that they had too much work. Some did not go into further detail, but those who did often talked of an untenable workload, alongside other issues such as staff shortages, long hours and impossible targets. This was often a problem which had lasted a considerable period of time.

**“As an experienced midwife of 34 years I found that I could not cope with the constant pressure and the stress of being responsible for the care of so many women and babies, with less staff, fewer resources, more complicated cases, no relief for breaks, finishing late after every shift and very little support from management.”**

Midwife, aged between 51-60  
Previously worked in the NHS, England



Some respondents (120, 6 percent) expressed frustration at the amount of time that they had to spend on paperwork and/or on the computer. Some felt that this was taking them away from direct patient care.

A number of people (72, 3 percent) commented that work shifts were too long and/or there was not enough time for breaks during a shift.

## Disillusionment with the quality of care

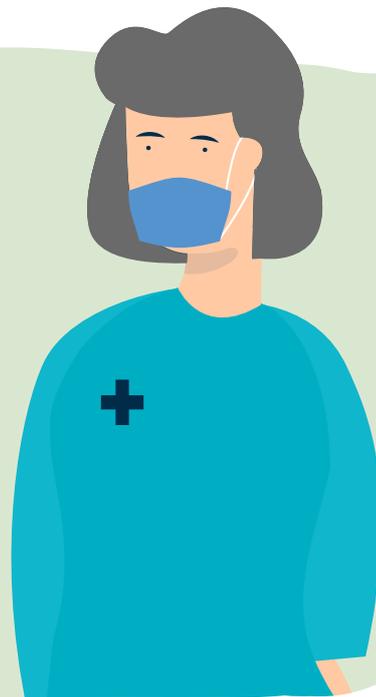
Around one in seven (293 comments, 14 percent) said that they were unhappy with the quality of care provided to patients.

The largest number of these (152, 7 percent) said that they were unable to spend as much time with patients as they wanted. Some people did not give further details. Those who did often said it was due to sheer volume of work, or more time spent on paperwork, or reduced length of appointments with patients.

Some respondents (74, 4 percent) felt that care standards in the profession, their organisation, or amongst certain staff or managers, were inadequate. Some questioned the clinical skills of other members of staff, or suggested that their organisation was too reliant on bank or agency staff.

**“Having worked full time in healthcare for over 40 years and seeing how patient care has been compromised by lack of suitably trained and qualified staff I did not want to be a part of that anymore. I understand the need for nursing to change and develop but it seems that the most experienced staff who should be spending time with patients to observe and monitor their changing conditions have other calls on their time.”**

Nurse, aged between 61-70  
Previously worked in NHS, England



Some respondents (44, 2 percent) felt that the working environment was actually dangerous to patients or staff, due to insufficient resources, overworked staff and neglected patients.

## Revalidation concerns

Around one in eight who made comments (280, 13 percent) cited concern about meeting the revalidation requirements as a reason to leave the register.

The most frequent reason for this (114 comments, 5 percent) was that people said that they could not complete the practice hours required to revalidate. This could be due to increased care commitments outside of work, or reduced need for bank staff.

The next most common reason was not being able to undertake sufficient training to meet the CPD requirements of revalidation. This was usually because people did not have time to undertake CPD either within working hours or outside of work. Others (47, 2 percent) found it difficult to get a confirmer for revalidation, particularly those people based outside the UK.

There were also some respondents (67, 3 percent) who said that the cost or the amount of work involved in revalidation was unduly onerous.

**“I took early retirement in 2015 age 55 and still worked as and when on the bank in my chosen speciality only. Over the next 5 years I found myself taking more long holidays many times a year, so I found I was not meeting the hours required to stay on the register.”**

Nurse aged 51–60  
Previously worked in the NHS, England



## The Covid-19 pandemic

We also asked an additional question this year around the Covid-19 pandemic: “Was your decision to leave the register affected by the Covid-19 pandemic?” People could select from four options:

- ‘No, I left the register before the Covid-19 pandemic.’
- ‘Yes, the pandemic influenced my decision to leave the register.’
- ‘No, the pandemic did not influence my decision to leave the register.’
- ‘Other, please specify below.’

As survey respondents had left the register between July 2019 and June 2020, only around one in five people (about 3,000 people) sent the survey would have left the register after the pandemic took hold in the UK in March 2020.

Therefore the pandemic did not feature very highly in survey respondents’ reasons for leaving. Just 2.3 percent (131 people) selected this as one of their top three reasons for leaving the register in response to the main question about reasons for leaving.

In response to the additional question about whether the pandemic had influenced their decision to leave the register:

- more than four in five (82.3 percent, or 4,641 people) said they left the register before the pandemic

Of the remaining 997 people who responded to this question:

- 14.2 percent (142 of 997) said the pandemic influenced their decision to leave
- about three quarters (74.2 percent, or 740 people) said the pandemic did not affect their decision to leave the register
- a further 11.5 percent (115 people) selected ‘other’ and then gave further details if they wished.

In total, 208 people made comments in the free text box of this question. Of these, 144 people directly said that the pandemic had impacted on their decision. More than a third of these people (55) said that they had left the register because their health or age made them clinically vulnerable to the virus. A further 21 people left because they lived with or cared for someone outside work who was clinically vulnerable.

**“I have four health problems and was advised by Drs not to return to work due to my health issues when the Covid-19 pandemic started.”**

Nurse aged 61–70  
Previously worked in the NHS, England

Other comments (24 people) made were that the pandemic had hastened an exit from the register that they were already planning; or that they did not wish to work during the pandemic alongside other challenges such as workload, stress or a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE).

# Section 3

## Differences between respondents

**We looked at whether particular groups of respondents had different reasons for leaving our register.**

### 3.1 Differences between people trained in different countries

Figures 2 to 4 show the six most frequently selected reasons for leaving by those who trained in the UK (Figure 2), those who trained in the EU (Figure 3), and those who trained outside of the EU (Figure 4).

#### People who trained in the UK

- As in previous years, retirement is by far the most common reason for leaving the register for people who had trained in the UK (60.4 percent, 2,789 of 4,621). It is the second most frequently selected reason for those who trained outside the EU (31.5 percent, 96 of 305). This is most likely due to the older age profile of UK leavers, and to a lesser extent leavers from outside the EU, who responded to the survey (see Figure 1). It is only cited by 3.1 percent (22 of 713) of those who trained in the EU.
- Change in personal circumstances was selected by a higher proportion of UK leavers (30.1 percent of this group) compared to EU leavers (21.9 percent) and leavers from outside the EU (18.7 percent). Likewise, more UK leavers (30.6 percent) mentioned this in their comments, compared with those trained outside the EU (17.6 percent) and those trained in the EU (14.6 percent).
- Too much pressure is the third most frequently cited reason for leaving the register by UK leavers, with around a quarter (25.4 percent) of this group selecting it. Only around one in ten of EU leavers (10 percent) and leavers from outside the EU (10.2 percent) selected this reason.
- Workplace culture was most frequently selected by those who had trained in the UK (19.6 percent), followed by those who had trained outside the EU (15.7 percent), and those trained in the EU (9.6 percent). In the free text comments, it was also mentioned more frequently by people who had trained in the UK (29.7 percent), compared to those who had trained in the EU (20.7 percent) and those who had trained outside the EU (16.5 percent).

#### People who trained outside of the UK

- Leaving or having left the UK is the most common reason for people who trained in the EU (79.2 percent) and outside of the EU (46.9 percent). Only 6.4 percent of UK leavers cite this as a reason for leaving. Nurses and midwives from the EU (40.2 percent, 33 of 82) and outside the EU (36.5 percent, 31 of 85) mention this significantly more often in their comments than those from the UK (4.6 percent, 89 of 1,943)

- People trained in the EU cite Brexit as their second most frequently selected reason for leaving (52.7 percent), but this is only cited by a small proportion of non-EU leavers (1.6 percent) and UK leavers (0.8 percent).
- People who trained outside of the UK and the EU cite concern about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements more frequently (17 percent) compared to UK leavers (14.4 percent) and EU leavers (8.7 percent).

**Figure 2**

**Top six reasons for leaving given by people who had trained in the UK**

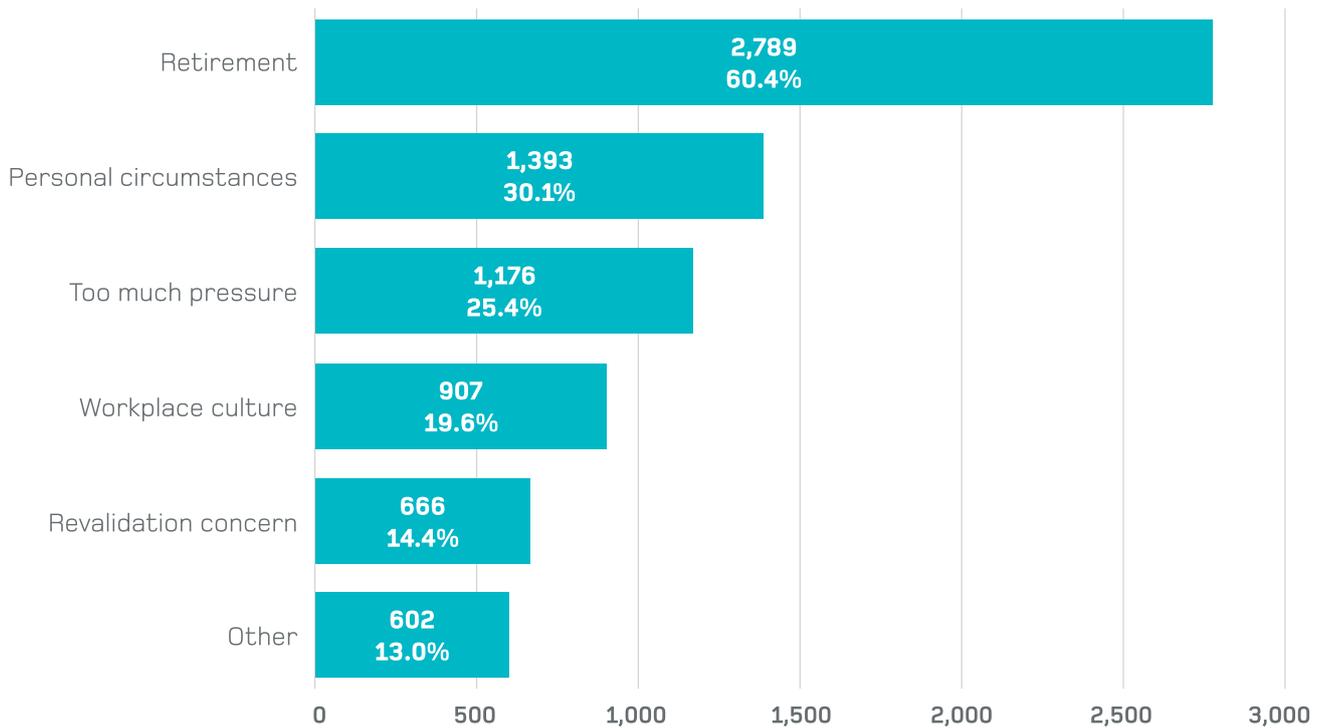


Figure 3

### Top six reasons for leaving given by people who trained in the EU

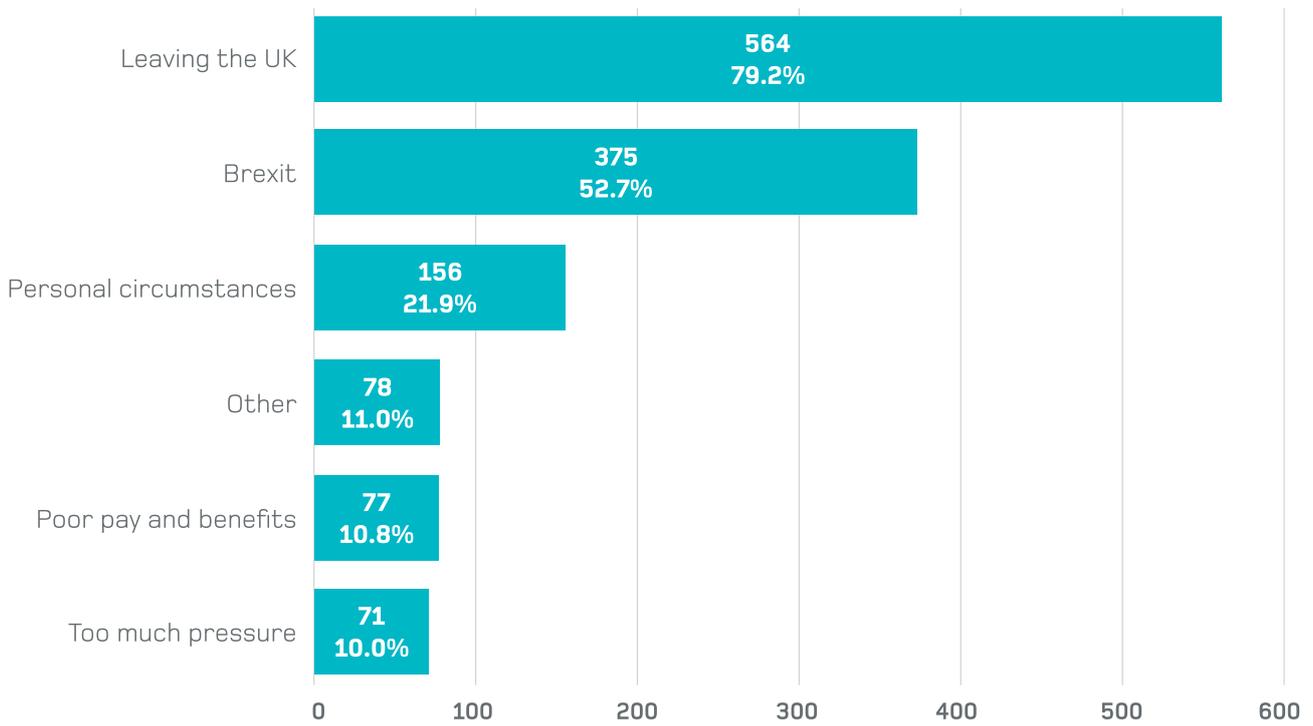
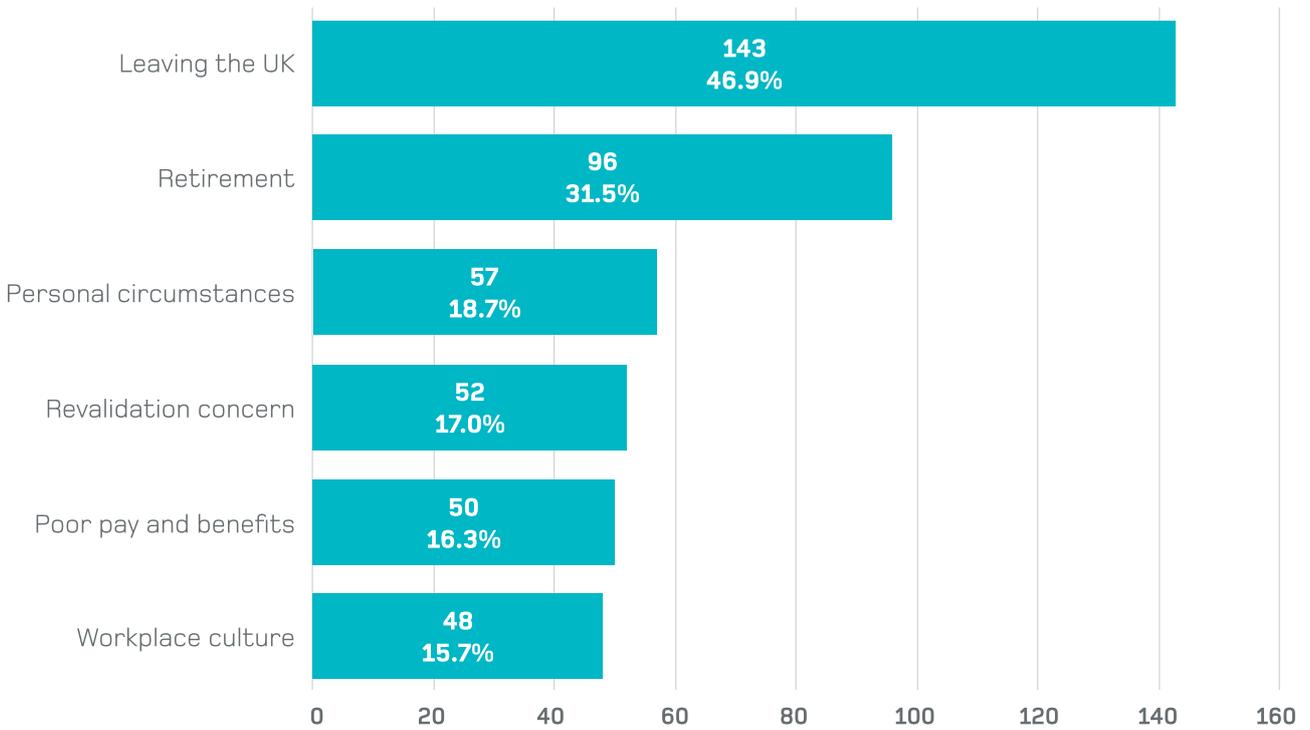


Figure 4

### Top six reasons for leaving given by people who trained outside of the EU



## 3.2 Reasons for leaving by country of practice

A considerably higher proportion of people who had practised in the UK gave **retirement** as a reason for leaving than those who had practised outside the UK.

Over half of people in the four countries of the UK said they were retiring: England: 52.6 percent or 2,339 of 4,443; Scotland: 58.3 percent or 305 of 523; Wales: 62.4 percent or 161 of 258; Northern Ireland: 58.5 percent or 69 of 118). This compares to less than a fifth of those who had been practising outside of the EU (16.8 percent or 20 of 119) and less than a tenth of those practising in the EU (6.7 percent or 11 of 165).

The proportions retiring may reflect the different age breakdowns by country of practice. Respondents who had practised in the UK had the highest proportions of people who were aged 51 and over compared to those who had practised outside the EU (55.4 percent aged 51 and over) and those who had practised in the EU (14.5 percent).

**Too much pressure** was also selected by higher proportions of people who had practised in the UK than outside it. Within the UK, a similar proportion (24 percent) of people in England, Scotland and Wales cited too much pressure but slightly less in Northern Ireland (23 percent). Less than one in ten people (7.3 percent or 12 of 165) who had practised in the EU cited too much pressure and less than 2 percent (2 of 119) of people who had practised outside the EU cited it. In the free text comments, people practising in one of the UK countries also mentioned too much pressure most frequently (21 percent, or 419 of 1,999). This compares to 7.7 percent (3 of 39) of those working in the EU and 7.6 percent of those working outside the EU (5 of 66).

The proportions of people who cited **workplace culture** as a reason for leaving in England, Scotland and Wales were similar (between 18 and 22 percent). However, around 12 percent of people who had practised in the EU selected this as a reason for leaving – the same percentage as those in Northern Ireland. A lower proportion of those who had practised outside the EU (5 percent or 6 of 119) cited this as a reason for leaving. Workplace culture was also mentioned more frequently in the free text comments by those who had practised in the UK (29.8 percent) than those who had practised in the EU (10.3 percent) and outside the EU (10.6 percent).

People who had worked outside the UK before leaving the register have, as might be expected, considerably higher proportions of people who cite **leaving the UK**, compared to those who had worked in the UK countries. Over half of those who had worked either in the EU or outside of the EU (59 percent) said they were leaving the UK compared to less than a fifth in the UK countries.

**Concern about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements** was also highest amongst those who had practised outside the EU. Nearly three in ten (29.4 percent, 35 of 119 people) who had practised outside the EU cited concern about revalidation. This was cited by 13.3 percent of those who had practised in one of the UK countries (711 of 5,340), and 18.8 percent (31 of 165) of those who had practised in the EU. Revalidation was also mentioned in over 30 percent of comments from those who had practised in the EU and outside the EU, compared to around 12 percent for each of the UK countries.

### 3.3 Reasons for leaving by age group

The most frequently selected reasons for leaving by age group show many similarities to previous years.

- Older groups (those aged over 50) are more likely than younger groups to cite: **retirement**; **too much pressure**; and **workplace culture**. People aged 51–60 had the highest proportion (24.8 percent, 409 of 1,652) who said that the workplace culture was having a negative effect on them. This compares to 12.2 percent (62 of 509) of people aged 21–30, and 16.1 percent (324 of 2,015) of people aged 61–70. People aged 51–60 also comment on workplace culture most frequently (37.2 percent of this age group, 262 of 705).
- Those aged over 71, and those aged 41–50 were the groups who selected **concern about meeting the revalidation requirements** most frequently (20.3 percent and 18.4 percent respectively). People aged 41–50 also mentioned revalidation most frequently (21.9 percent) in their free text comments.
- Younger groups (those aged 21–30) are more likely than older groups to cite: **Leaving the UK**; **Brexit**; and **poor pay and benefits** (17.3 percent or 88 of 508 people aged 21–30 cited this reason, as did 16.3 percent or 111 of 680 of those aged 31–40).

### 3.4 Reasons for leaving by scope of practice

We compared reasons for leaving for the four most common scopes of practice: adult and general nursing (3,016 respondents in the weighted sample); general practice nursing (562 respondents); mental health nursing (546 respondents); and midwifery (384 respondents).

As was the case last year, mental health nurses had the highest proportions of people who selected **retirement** (56.5 percent, 309 of 546) as a reason for leaving. This compares to 51.4 percent (289 of 562) of general practice nurses; 51.1 percent (196 of 384) of midwives; and 48 percent (1,448 of 3,016) of adult and general care nurses.

One reason for this may be that mental health nurses have a slightly older age profile than the other scopes of practice. Over three quarters (76.7 percent) of respondents who had worked in mental health were aged 51 and above; 67.2 percent of those from general practice; 66.1 percent of those from adult and general care nursing; and 64.2 percent of those who had worked in midwifery.

As in previous years, **too much pressure** was cited most frequently by midwives (35.8 percent), followed by mental health nurses (30 percent). Around one in five adult and general care nurses (21.2 percent) and general practice nurses (18.9 percent) also cited this as a reason for leaving. In the free text comments, midwives (33.3 percent, 45 of 135) were also significantly more likely than people working in other scopes of practice to mention stress or pressure as a reason for leaving. People working in adult and general care (20.6 percent, 220 of 1,069), and mental health (22.2 percent, 49 of 221), brought this up less frequently in the free text comments.

**Workplace culture** was also selected most frequently by mental health nurses (23.8 percent) and midwives (23.3 percent). It was selected slightly less frequently by adult

and general care nurses (17.2 percent) and general practice nurses (14.3 percent). Likewise, in the free text comments, workplace culture was mentioned most frequently by midwives (37.8 percent, 51 of 135) and mental health nurses (36.2 percent, 80 of 221). In other scopes of practice the proportions commenting on negative workplace culture were lower: in adult and general nursing it was 27.7 percent (296 of 1,069) and in general practice, 25 percent (49 of 196).

**Disillusionment with the quality of care** was also an area that was cited relatively frequently by midwives (18.4 percent) and mental health nurses (16.3 percent). It was selected slightly less frequently by those working in adult and general care nursing (10.6 percent) and general practice nursing (8.7 percent).

**Leaving the UK** was, however, more likely to be cited by those who worked in general practice nursing (21.8 percent) and adult and general nursing (21.3 percent). It was least likely to be selected by those in mental health nursing (9.7 percent). These results may be linked to the demographic breakdowns of the people in these scopes of practice. For example, a relatively high proportion of people in the weighted sample who worked in general practice (28.7 percent) and adult and general care (21.8 percent) had been trained outside the UK.



### 3.5 Reasons for leaving by whether people worked in the NHS or not

Over three quarters (77.4 percent, or 4,366 people) of respondents in the weighted sample had worked in the NHS in their most recent job, and 21.9 percent (1,232 people) had not<sup>3</sup>. We compared each group's reasons for leaving.

People who had worked in the NHS were more likely to cite some reasons.

- **Retirement.** Over half (54.1 percent, 2,361 people) of those who had worked in the NHS selected retirement as a reason for leaving, compared to 43.8 percent (540) people who had worked outside the NHS. This doesn't appear to be due to the age profile of the two groups; people who worked in the NHS had in fact a slightly lower proportion of people aged 51 and over (69.1 percent) compared to those who had worked outside the NHS (71.2 percent). As was the case last year, retirement was selected by a higher proportion of younger groups of NHS leavers (particularly those aged 51–60) compared to those who had worked outside the NHS (see Figures 5 and 6).
- Similar to last year, there were a number of reasons related to working conditions which were more frequently selected by those who had worked in the NHS than those who had worked outside it. Just under a quarter (23.8 percent) of people who had worked in the NHS cited **too much pressure** as a reason for leaving, compared with 18.4 percent of those who had worked outside the NHS.
- The new option about **workplace culture** was also selected more frequently by those who had worked in the NHS (19 percent) compared to those who had not (15.1 percent). This was also mentioned significantly more often in the free text comments by former NHS workers (30.3 percent) compared to those who had worked outside the NHS (23.2 percent). **Disillusionment with the quality of care** was cited by a higher proportion of former NHS workers (11.7 percent) compared to those who had worked outside the NHS (8.8 percent). Lastly, **staffing** was selected in greater proportions for those who had worked in the NHS (11.8 percent) than those who had not (7.2 percent).

People who had not worked in the NHS were more likely to cite other reasons.

- **Concerns about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements.** This was selected by 19.4 percent of those who had worked outside the NHS, compared to 12.2 percent of those who had worked in the NHS. This reason was also commented on significantly more frequently by those who had worked outside the NHS (16.8 percent) than those who had worked in the NHS (12.3 percent).
- **I still work in healthcare but my role no longer requires NMC registration.** This reason was selected by a higher proportion of people who had worked outside the NHS (8.8 percent), compared to those who had worked in the NHS (4.2 percent).

Figure 5

**NHS respondents – retirement by age group (n=4,366)**

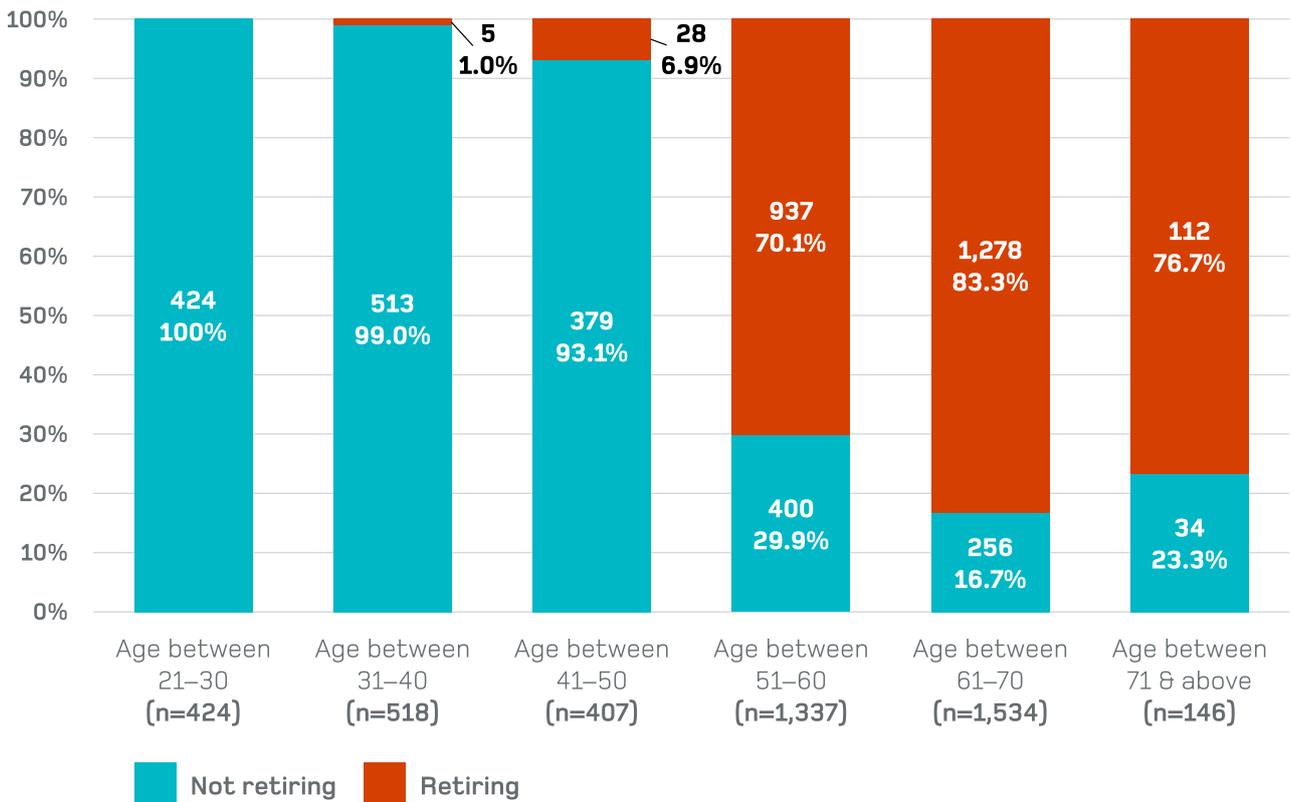
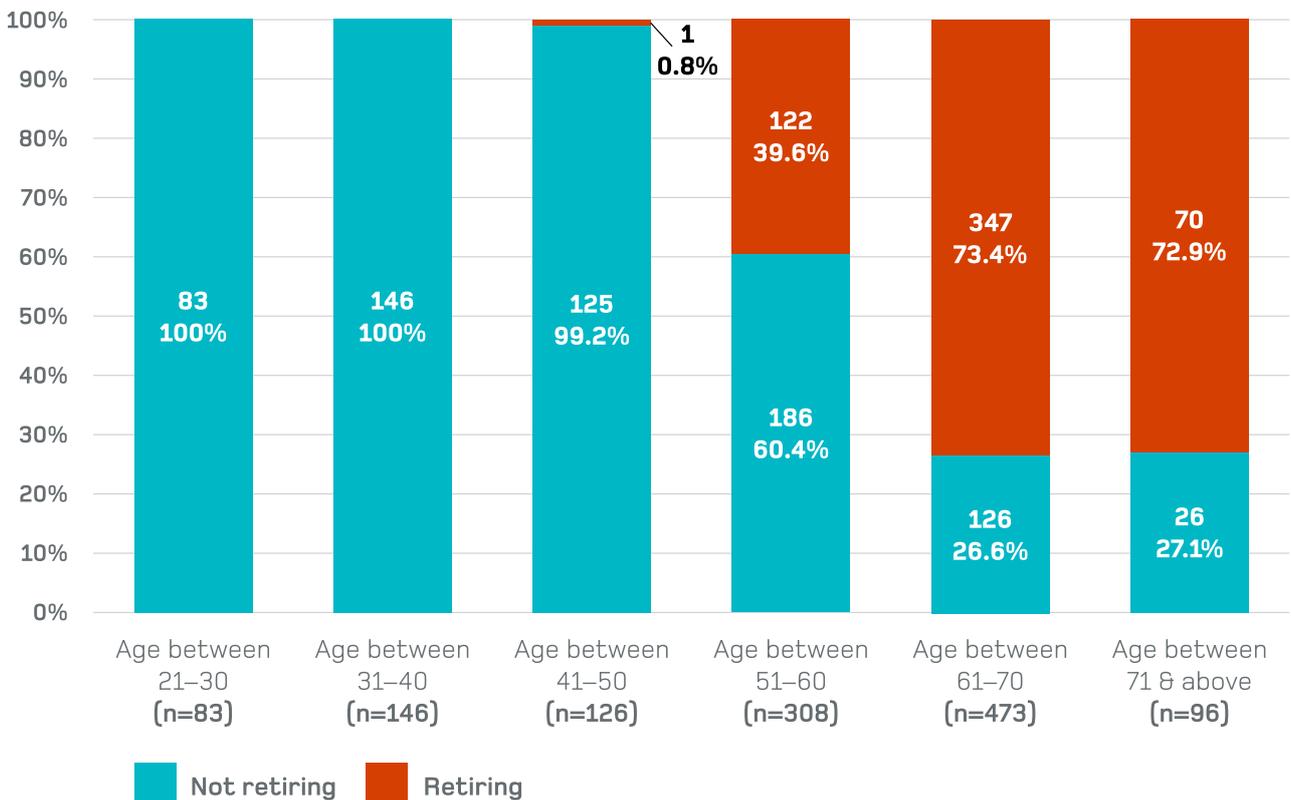


Figure 6

**Non-NHS respondents – retirement by age group (n=1,232)**



# Annexe 1: Our approach

## The people who left our register

Just under 21,800 nurses, midwives and nursing associates left our register between July 2019 and June 2020.

## Selecting people to take part in our survey

Before inviting people to take part in the survey, we removed anyone whom it would not be appropriate to contact. This included the following groups:

- people who had previously indicated that they did not wish to be contacted for research purposes
- people who had died
- people who had had a current or recent fitness to practise case, or were subject to fitness to practise sanctions
- people who had since rejoined the permanent register
- people who had joined the emergency temporary register set up during the Covid-19 pandemic.

An email was sent to the remaining 15,320 people inviting them to take part in the survey. There were a number of emails that bounced back, or were invalid, meaning that the final number of invitations delivered were 14,996 (12,075 UK leavers; 2,069 EU leavers; and 852 leavers trained outside the EU).

## The people who responded to our survey

Overall we received 5,639 responses to the survey. This represents a statistically significant response rate of 37.6 percent. This is higher than previous years; for example, last year's survey had a response rate of 26 percent.

Response rates differed between groups. As with previous years, we saw a higher response rate from those people who had trained in the UK, compared with those who had trained in the EU or outside the EU. However, all three groups had a higher response rate than last year.

- More than four in ten people (42.3 percent, 5,112 of 12,075) who had trained in the UK responded.
- About one in six people (16.5 percent, 342 of 2,069) who had trained in the EU responded.
- About one in five people (21.7 percent, 185 of 852) who had trained outside the EU responded.

## Analysing the responses

To make the survey data more representative of the wider group of people who had left the register, we applied a 'weight' to the data. The weighting took account of two factors: age and country of training. These factors have been shown in previous surveys to have an impact on the reasons for leaving that people selected.

In practice, what this means is that responses from people who trained outside of the UK have been given more significance, or 'weight' in our analysis. This is to compensate for the lower number of responses from these people. The weighting also took account of the breakdown of age groups of survey respondents, compared to the whole population of people leaving the register. This meant that younger age groups were given more significance, or 'weight' in our analysis, as we received fewer responses from them.

## Analysing free text comments in the survey

Some respondents (37.4 percent or 2,112 people) provided free text comments about their reasons for leaving the register. The analysis of these comments was carried out by an external research organisation, Alpha Research.

The comments were analysed thematically using the same analytical framework of 21 main options outlined in the pre-coded question. Within each theme, a number of sub-themes were identified. Some comments were given multiple codes, if the response covered several different themes.

Z-tests were undertaken to explore the differences by respondent sub-group across the (coded) open-ended responses. A Z-test is a statistical test used to test the hypothesis that proportions from two independent samples differ greatly. Only statistically significant differences in free text responses are reported.

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