May 2023

2023 NMC Register Leavers Survey

Summary report

NMC Research and Evidence
Objectives

We maintain the register of professional nurses, midwives and nursing associates eligible to practise in the UK – monitoring the number of people joining and leaving the register.

Professionals can tell us why they are leaving our register, but most choose not to.

We have run a leavers’ survey since 2017 to try and better understand why people leave our register.

We refreshed our survey in 2023 to give us better insights about the impact of issues in the wider health and social care sector on people’s reasons for leaving.

We also wanted to understand better the relationship between professionals’ characteristics and their reasons for leaving.
Methodology

A short **online survey** was sent to those who left the register between January and December 2022.

26,618 professionals left in 2022. We **invited 21,975 to take part** in the survey (removing those who do not wish to take part in research for example) and received **7,226 responses** (33% response rate).

The survey was live between **22nd March and 2nd April 2023**.

Questions covered topics such as reasons for leaving, their likelihood to return to the register and the impacts of Covid.

**Results should not be directly compared** with previous leavers’ survey results for several reasons:
- New question codes and survey structure will impact on the specific percentages and values.
- Previous data was weighted on age and education region to match leaver profile – this has not been repeated due to unreliable weighting factors (see the annexe for more sample details).
Executive Summary

Retirement is still the most common reason for leaving – factors ‘outside the workplace’ such as ‘leaving the UK’ as well as ‘retirement’ account for why most people leave the register.

Several ‘within workplace’ factors are frequently cited, with five often mentioned together: ‘Burnout’, ‘Lack of colleague support’, ‘Concern about the quality of care for the public’, ‘Workload’ and ‘Staffing’.

Professionals who cite one of these five factors are among those least likely to return to a career as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate – in addition to a high proportion leaving earlier than planned.

A trend of leaving our register earlier than planned is also true of most leavers generally. Perhaps unsurprisingly, very few intend to return to nursing and midwifery in the future.

Certain cohorts are less likely to return or recommend a career in nursing or midwifery – those working in the NHS, midwives, younger and UK educated professionals.

As in previous years, pay and benefits is cited as a reason for leaving by those who were educated outside the UK – for younger professionals this is linked to the cost of living crisis.
Section 1:

Retirement remains the most common reason for leaving. Factors ‘outside the workplace’ are the main drivers for leaving but ‘within workplace’ reasons frequently cited.
The main reasons for leaving are broadly consistent with previous years

What was your main reason for leaving the NMC Register?
All respondents – Top 10 reasons selected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>My physical or mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Burnout or exhaustion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A change in personal circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I am leaving/have left the UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Concern about meeting the revalidation requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lack of support from colleagues or senior members of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Quality of care provided to members of the public and people who use services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Experiences of bullying, harassment, or discrimination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While we can’t compare directly with previous years, the Top 10 reasons for leaving are consistent with themes identified in previous iterations of the survey.

Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason [for leaving]? Base: N=7,226

= added to survey in 2023
Education region remains a differentiator – nuances to the reasoning for each group

Why did you leave the NMC Register: Reasons with significant differences. All respondents – split by education region.

UK Educated • EU Educated • Overseas Educated (non-EU)

UK educated report factors such as health, retirement and lack of support. EU educated more often report a change in personal circumstances and leaving the UK.

Q8: Using the list below, please tell us the reasons why you left the NMC register: You can select up to five reasons. Base: UK Educated N=6,810 EU Educated N=178, Overseas Educated N=218

- Retirement
  - UK Educated: 61%
  - EU Educated: 36%
  - Overseas Educated: 31%

- Physical or mental health
  - UK Educated: 12%
  - EU Educated: 18%
  - Overseas Educated: 19%

- Lack of colleague support
  - UK Educated: 6%
  - EU Educated: 6%
  - Overseas Educated: 8%

- Quality of care for the public
  - UK Educated: 17%
  - EU Educated: 6%
  - Overseas Educated: 6%

- Personal circumstances
  - UK Educated: 14%
  - EU Educated: 30%
  - Overseas Educated: 18%

- Pay and benefits
  - UK Educated: 11%
  - EU Educated: 16%
  - Overseas Educated: 23%

- Leaving the UK
  - UK Educated: 4% (Retirement)
  - EU Educated: 45%
  - Overseas Educated: 3%

=significant difference at 95% significance level
Retirement a standout reason among UK leavers – health and burnout secondary factors

Why did you leave the NMC Register?
UK Educated leavers.

Q8: Using the list below, please tell us the reasons why you left the NMC register: You can select up to five reasons. Base: N=6,810.
Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason [for leaving]? Base: N=6,810
‘Leaving the UK’ a key reason for EU leavers – personal circumstances are often tied to this

Why did you leave the NMC Register?
EU Educated leavers.

Q8: Using the list below, please tell us the reasons why you left the NMC register: You can select up to five reasons. Base: N=178. Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason [for leaving]? Base: N=178

Leading reasons for EU educated leavers were broadly consistent and comparable to previous years.

- Leaving the UK (71%)
- Personal circumstances (30%)
- Burnout/exhaustion (18%)
- Staffing levels (17%)
- Pay and benefits (16%)
- Workload (13%)
- Physical or mental health (12%)
- Workload (12%)
- Other (10%)
- Revalidation concerns (5%)
- Quality of care for the public (4%)
- Flexibility of hours (2%)
- Experiences of bullying (2%)

EU Educated

- A reason for me leaving
- The main reason I left
Overseas leavers sit between UK and EU trends – albeit with ‘pay’ significantly more important

Why did you leave the NMC Register? Overseas Educated (non-EU) leavers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaving the UK</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay and benefits</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing levels</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal circumstances</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical or mental health</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout/exhaustion</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revalidation concerns</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of care for the public</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of bullying</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing levels</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay and benefits</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal circumstances</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical or mental health</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout/exhaustion</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revalidation concerns</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of care for the public</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overseas educated leavers were also broadly consistent with comparable to previous years.

Q8: Using the list below, please tell us the reasons why you left the NMC register: You can select up to five reasons. Base: N=218. Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason [for leaving]? Base: N=218
Reasons for leaving can broadly be grouped into those ‘outside’ or ‘within’ the workplace

**Outside Workplace**
- “A new job in the UK that doesn’t need NMC registration”
- “Retirement”
- “A change in personal circumstances”
- “I am leaving/have left the UK”

**Within Workplace**
- “Workload”
- “Flexibility of hours”
- “Pay and benefits”
- “Quality of care for the public”
- “Experiences of bullying, harassment, or discrimination”
- “Concern uphold NMC standards”
- “Burnout or exhaustion”
- “Lack of support from colleagues or senior staff”
- “Concern about meeting the revalidation requirements”
- “Lack of development or training opportunities”
- “Felt unable to raise concerns”
- “My physical or mental health”
- “Felt unable to raise concerns”
Across all groups, factors ‘outside the workplace’ drive reasons for leaving…

What was your main reason for leaving the NMC Register?
All respondents – Split by education region.

Despite there being fewer ‘outside’ reasons, these account for most people’s reasons for leaving.

Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason [for leaving]? Base: UK Educated N=6,810 EU Educated N=178, Overseas Educated N=218
…but ‘within workplace’ factors are still common – often co-existing with other factors

Why did you leave the NMC Register?
All Respondents – number of ‘reasons’ chosen (out of five).

- 13

Q8: Using the list below, please tell us the reasons why you left the NMC register: You can select up to five reasons. Base: N=7,226

Values are the number of reasons selected for leaving when choosing a factor (scores could range from one to five).

A score of three means people selected three reasons for leaving – this being the variable shown and two more reasons.

‘Inside’ factors more likely to be reported along with multiple reasons for leaving.
Most professionals are leaving the register earlier than planned – with very few intending to return in future
Only one in four professionals leave when they planned – most left earlier than expected

Have you left the register earlier than planned?  
All respondents.*

- Much earlier
- A little earlier
- Roughly when expected
- A little later
- Much later
- N/A - I hadn’t planned

52%

24%
28%
25%
8%
7%
8%

Over half of professionals leave the register sooner than planned…

…EU educated professionals, midwives and disabled professionals are significantly more likely to say they left earlier than expected.

A minority (14.9%) do work for longer than they expected.

*Don’t know not listed = 0.5%

Q7: Thinking about when you left the NMC register, how does this compare with when you expected to leave the register? Base: N=7,226
While this tapers with age, most older professionals still leave before they planned

Have you left the register earlier than planned?
All respondents by age.

One in five aged under 50 hadn’t thought about leaving the register. Those aged 50-65 likely to have thought about when they want to leave but most are still leaving earlier than planned.

Leaving expectations linked to pension age – 65+ being the only age group with more people leaving ‘later’ rather than ‘earlier’ than planned.

Q7: Thinking about when you left the NMC register, how does this compare with when you expected to leave the register? Base: 21-40 N=575, 41-50 N=325, 51-60 N=2,255, 61-65 N=2,282, 65+ N=1,789
Leave means leave, as many are unlikely to return – particularly true for those aged 40+

Likelihood of returning to nursing and midwifery.
All respondents and by age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-40</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-65</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar trend seen with duration of time on the register.

21-40’s ‘likely’ score boosted by EU and Overseas leavers who are more likely to return to a career in the sector – but this could be continuing their careers outside the UK.

“My intention was to come back a few days a week, following my retirement, but the pressure was too much, and the thought of nursing ever again makes me feel unwell.” Nurse, England, 51-60
Professionals leaving the register are doing so with weak endorsement of the career

Likelihood to recommend a career in nursing or midwifery.
All respondents – Net Promoter Score.

Q5: On a scale of 0-10, how likely would you be to recommend a career as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate to friends or family?

Base: N=7,226, U55 N=1,157 O55 N=6,069, UK Educated N=6,810 EU Educated N=178, Overseas Educated N=218, NHS N=5,651 Outside NHS N=2,208, Nurse N=6,627, Midwife N=500

*NPS* = NET promoter score: Proportion of detractors subtracted from the proportion of promoters
“I’ve enjoyed my career in the NHS and as a community nurse, but I’m unsure if I would recommend this career as the stress and pressure on nurses these day is almost intolerable.”

Nurse, England, aged 65+
The pandemic had a direct influence on one in five professionals’ decision to leave the register

Did the pandemic influence your decision of when to leave?  
All respondents by age.

**No**

It didn’t influence my decision of when to leave the register

66%

**Yes**

I left earlier than planned because of the pandemic

22%

I left later than planned because of the pandemic

10%

Don’t know = 2%

Q15: Did the Covid-19 pandemic influence your decision of when to leave the register? Base: N=7,226
Section 3:

Addressing poor workplace experiences could help retain more early leavers – pay concerns were more prevalent for those educated overseas.
In focus: Understanding Workplace Factors
A group of five ‘within workplace’ factors are often cited together

1. Burnout/Exhaustion
2. Lack of colleague support
3. Quality of care for the public
4. Workload
5. Staffing

Individual rank in ‘Main Reason’ for Leaving:
3rd, 8th, 9th, 11th, 12th

Collective rank in ‘Main Reason for Leaving’:
2nd

Retirement remains the leading reason.

Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason [for leaving]? Base: N=7,226
A lack of support from management and constantly working short staffed. I felt unable to provide good nursing care due to staffing levels and lack of community services available.

Nurse, Scotland, aged 31-40
These factors were particularly influential for UK educated leavers who are ‘non-retirees’

Why did you leave the NMC Register?
UK Educated professionals – with and without ‘Retired’.

The five factors collectively rank second as the ‘main reason for leaving’ among UK Educated leavers.

For UK educated leavers those not selecting ‘retirement’, the ‘five factors’ are the top ‘main reason’ for leaving.

Two thirds of UK educated non-retirees report that one of the ‘five factors’ was ‘one of the reasons’ why they left.

Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason [for leaving]? Base: N=6,810 Base: Excluding those selecting retirement at Q8 N=2,636
Certain cohorts across the workforce are particularly feeling these collective pressures.

Why did you leave the NMC Register?: Selecting ‘Five Factors’
All respondents excluding those who ‘retired’.

Q8: Using the list below, please tell us the reasons why you left the NMC register: Up to five reasons. Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason? Base: U55 N=1,100 O55 N=1,849, UK Educated N=2,636 EU Educated N=171, Overseas Educated N=139, NHS N=2,190 Outside NHS N=975, Nurse N=2,666, Midwife N=246
"I enjoyed my career however working conditions have changed dramatically. The pressure placed on staff has increased and felt I could no longer continue in the profession."

Midwife, Wales, 51-60
These professionals are not only leaving the workforce sooner but also for good

Likelihood to return to a career as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate. All respondents excluding those who ‘retired’.

“I always worked in A&E and enjoyed the teamwork and fast pace of the department. However, even before Covid there was a lot of pressure on the system. Lack of staff and support was dwindling. Sadly, it came to the stage of burnout for me.”

Nurse, Northern Ireland, 31-40

Q6: How likely are you to return to a career as a registered nurse, midwife or nursing associate in future? **Base:** Main reason: Chose 5 factor N=899, Didn’t choose 5 factor N=2060. Any leave reason: Chose 5 factor N=1,879, Didn’t choose 5 factor N=1,080
In focus: Contextualising Pay and Benefits
Pay and benefits are an issue for professionals educated outside the UK and who are younger.

Pay and benefits are a higher ranking reason for leaving among non-UK educated professionals.

Pay/Benefits as a reason for leaving.
‘Main reasons’ score and rank by education region.

- **Overseas Educated (non-EU)**: 7% (4th /19 factors)
- **EU Educated**: 4% (6th /19 factors)
- **UK Educated**: 1% (14th /19 factors)

Pay and Benefits are a factor for one in four under 55’s – while impacting less than one in 10 over 55’s.

Q8: Using the list below, please tell us the reasons why you left the NMC register: You can select up to five reasons. Base: N=7,226. Q9: Now can you tell us which of these was your main reason [for leaving]? Base: UK Educated N=6,810 EU Educated N=178, Overseas Educated N=218, U55 N=1,157 O55 N=6,069
This is consistent with those impacted by the cost of living crisis – under 40’s feel this most

Did the cost of living crisis influence you decision of when to leave?
All respondents by age.

Younger professionals report cost of living has impacted them – with more opting to leave the register earlier than planned.

There is less impact on decision making reported by on older cohorts – a small group aged 65+ are extending their time on the register.

Q16: Did the cost of living crisis influence your decision of when to leave the register? Base: 21-40 N=575, 41-50 N=325, 51-60 N=2,255, 61-65 N=2,282, 65+ N=1,789
Staying on the UK register is unattractive for those citing poor pay educated outside the UK

Why did you leave the NMC Register?
Top 9 reasons selected – EU and Overseas Educated professionals.

- Leaving the UK: 65%
- Staffing levels: 47%
- Workload: 46%
- Burnout/exhaustion: 34%
- Physical or mental health: 20%
- Quality of care for the public: 17%
- Flexibility of hours: 17%
- Personal circumstances: 15%
- Experiences of bullying: 10%

A high proportion of all non-UK educated professionals leaving the NMC register say they are leaving the UK.

Those mentioning ‘Pay and Benefits’ cite wider workplace factors – they are less likely to report a change in personal circumstances.

Is this an indication that this group are looking elsewhere to continue their career? 29% of this group ‘Likely’ to return to a career in nursing or midwifery in future.

Q8: Using the list below, please tell us the reasons why you left the NMC register: You can select up to five reasons. Base: N=396. LOW BASE SIZE ‘Report Pay and Benefits N=78’
Executive Summary

Retirement is still the most common reason for leaving – factors ‘outside the workplace’ such as ‘leaving the UK’ as well as ‘retirement’ account for why most people leave the register.

Several ‘within workplace’ factors are frequently cited, with five often mentioned together: ‘Burnout’, ‘Lack of colleague support’, ‘Concern about the quality of care for the public’, ‘Workload’ and ‘Staffing’.

Professionals who cite one of these five factors among those least likely to return to a career as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate – in addition to a high proportion leaving earlier than planned.

A trend of leaving our register earlier than planned is also true of most leavers generally. Perhaps unsurprisingly, very few intend to return to nursing and midwifery in future.

Certain cohorts are less likely to return or recommend a career in nursing or midwifery – those working in the NHS, midwives, younger and UK educated professionals.

As in previous years, pay and benefits is cited as a reason for leaving by those who were educated outside the UK – for younger professionals this is linked to the cost of living crisis.
Thank you

researchandevidence@nmc-uk.org
Annexe
Sample skews giving a slightly older and UK educated set of respondents vs. all 2022 Leavers

**education Region**

- **UK Trained**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 86%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 95%
- **EU Trained**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 6%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 2%
- **Overseas Trained**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 7%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 3%

**Registration Type**

- **Nurse (incl. SCPHN)**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 92%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 92%
- **Midwife (incl. SCPHN)**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 6%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 7%
- **Nursing Associate**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 1%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 0%
- **Nurse & Midwife (incl. SCPHN)**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 1%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 1%

**Age**

- **21-30**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 6%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 2%
- **31-40**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 13%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 6%
- **41-50**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 9%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 28%
- **51-60**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 31%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 32%
- **61-65**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 23%
  - Leaver survey respondents: 20%
- **65+**
  - All 2022 Leavers: 25%

**SOURCE:** NMC Data 2022