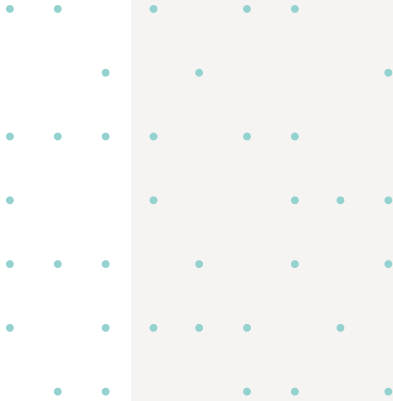


# Care staffing in the NHS: the good, the bad and the promising.

October 2018



**BPP**  
UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF NURSING



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# Introduction.

When we talk about staffing in the NHS, it's very easy to assume that it is an organization in perpetual crisis. We rarely talk about its resilience, its flexibility, or its determination. The challenges the NHS faces shouldn't be underestimated. Funding is always tight and the demands on care are always increasing.

Yet despite these challenges, hospital trusts have been remarkably successful at maintaining and even slightly increasing staffing care numbers. As our analysis shows, absolute nurse numbers remained broadly stable between 2015 and 2017. What's more, health care assistant numbers – which tend to be overlooked – increased significantly. We can be pretty certain that this is an accurate reflection of the situation – although there were marked regional differences – because the overwhelming majority of trusts we approached (89%) responded.

What is also abundantly clear, however, is that maintaining the status quo is not good enough. Absolute numbers cannot account for the loss of expertise as experienced staff are replaced by inexperienced recruits, for instance. Nor can they shed any light on the biggest challenge facing the NHS – the inexorable rise in demand for care and the failure to recruit enough additional staff to meet that demand.

Two other sets of statistics show the extent of the problem. Between 2015 and 2017 nurse vacancy rates shot up by a fifth while the use of agency staff soared by more than a third.

To fill this shortfall NHS trusts will have to innovate and think even more flexibly about recruitment and training. There are signs they are already doing so. As our figures show, the amount of care provided by health care assistants (HCAs) is already substantial and is growing. Clinical apprenticeships, although in their infancy, are another promising source.

Another additional source of potential recruits has proved less fruitful. Numbers of male nurses have stayed flat for a decade. There is no intrinsic reason why this should be so. The fact that some trusts are better than others at recruiting men and that male recruitment into HCA roles is substantially higher than into nursing roles suggests that this talent pool could be expanded.

For all the challenges it is forced to confront, the NHS has a remarkable capacity to innovate when the need arises. Witness the Talent for Care initiative, which highlighted the need to redress the skills deficit in support staff, a few years ago. I have no doubt that it will continue to rise to that challenge and that BPP, with over 40 years' experience in professional training, will be able to help them.

***Professor Lynne Gell is Dean of BPP University School of Nursing.***





# Context and overview.

The NHS is the biggest employer in England and the fifth biggest in the world. It is also the best healthcare system for safe care, affordability and equity, even though we spend less on it (9.75% of GDP) than France (11%), Germany (11%) or the US (17%)\*. But it is struggling to recruit enough nurses and other care staff as vacancy figures out earlier this year made clear.

Yet vacancy rates, while an extremely important indicator, only give a partial picture of staff numbers. This survey is an attempt to place those figures in context by looking at overall care numbers over a two-year period from December 2015 to December 2017, the latest period for which data was available when the survey was commissioned\*\*.

The survey also attempts to shine a light on two overlooked aspects of care – what is happening to the numbers of health care assistants (HCAs) and is the gender complexion of care changing as hospitals seek to exploit alternative sources of recruitment?

It is clear from this research that although vacancy rates have risen substantially, nursing numbers in hospitals have remained broadly flat. In other words, the crisis in recruitment is largely down to trusts being unable to meet rising demand rather than nursing numbers going into reverse. If the NHS is to solve its care staffing crisis, standing still is not an option; merely replacing departing colleagues will do nothing to meet the growing demands for care.

That is why it's instructive to assess health care assistant numbers alongside nursing numbers and the gender breakdown of both. Could HCAs and greater numbers of men in care roles help meet trusts' recruitment needs? The answer to the first seems to be 'yes' and to the second 'partially'. HCA numbers are increasing across the country and now account for three in ten of all care roles. But while the numbers of male nurses have hardly increased, numbers of male HCAs have – to the point where they now make up almost one in five of all positions, significantly more than the proportion of male nurses.

It's important, too, to look at the staffing picture by region and by type of trust because the national picture tends to obscure a lot of variation. Not all regions have been hit equally hard by the nursing vacancy crisis, for instance, and some are far better than others at attracting men into care roles.

## Main points

- Nursing numbers in hospital trusts barely increased from December 2015 to December 2017
- Nursing vacancies increased by a fifth (21%) during the same period
- HCA numbers increased by 6.5%
- For every additional nurse hired, four HCAs were appointed
- Men make up only one in ten nurses (11%)
- But almost one in five HCAs (18%)
- HCAs now account for three in ten care roles in NHS trusts (29%)

## BPP nursing and HCA courses

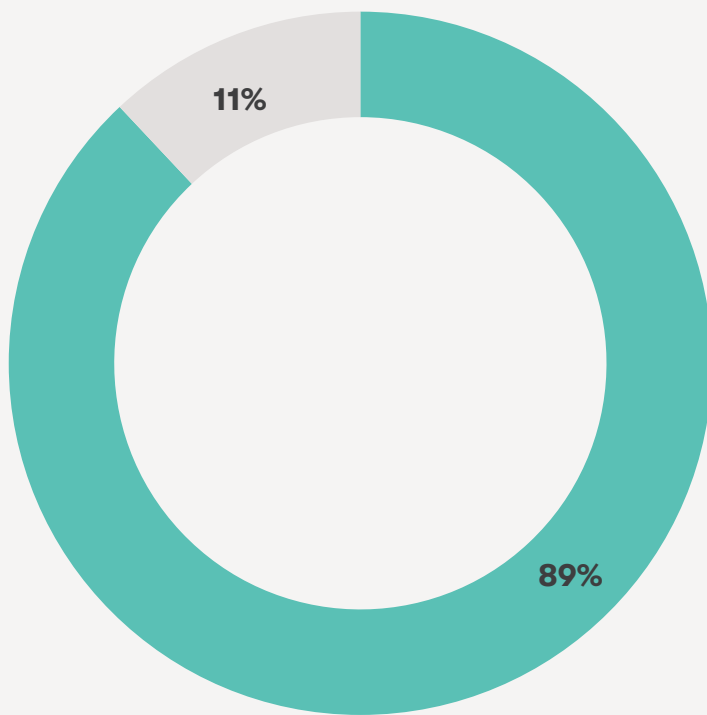
- HEC Health & Social Care
- HCA Assistant Practitioner Apprenticeship
- Nursing Associate Apprenticeship
- BSc (Hons) Healthcare Practice (Diploma to Degree)
- BSc (Hons) Nursing (Adult, Mental Health, Child)
- Nursing Degree Apprenticeships
- Bridging Modules Level 3
- Study Skills and Research Appreciation and Methodology Level 5



# Trust profile.

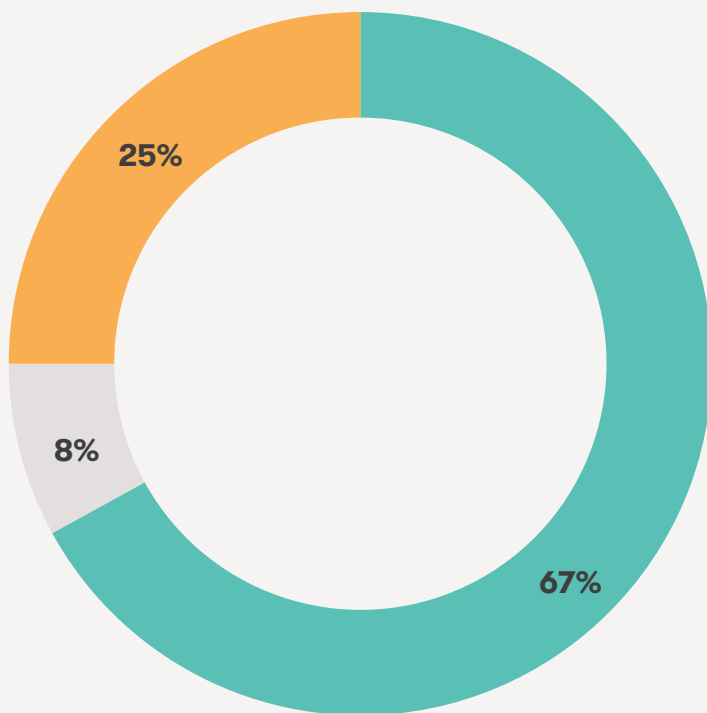
- We approached 220 NHS trusts in England of which 195, or 89%, responded
- Of that total, 67% were acute trusts, 8% were community trusts and 25% mental health trusts. Ambulance trusts were not included as they were not relevant to this exercise
- Trusts in all 13 NHS regions in England responded, with the participation rate ranging from 80% to a high of 100%
- Nursing figures only relate to hospital trusts, they do not include other posts in other places such as practice nurses, for instance
- To ensure accurate comparability, only data from December 2015 to December 2017 was included. Most of the information was gathered during July and August 2018 using Freedom of Information requests to individual NHS trusts
- Other sources of data used were the NHS Vacancy Statistics England, February 2015 to March 2018, published on 26 July 2018, NHS Key Statistics, published by House of Commons Library in May 2018, and the NHS Workforce Statistics, published on 21 June 2018
- All percentages have been rounded to the nearest 0.5





### Trust response rate

- NHS trusts who responded
- NHS trusts who didn't respond



### Response by trust type

- Acute trusts
- Community trusts
- Mental health trusts

# What has happened to nursing and HCA numbers?

- The number of nurses in the responding trusts remained virtually unchanged over a two-year period, increasing slightly from 270,725 in December 2015 to 272,476 in December 2017, a rise of 0.5%
- Nurse vacancy rates in the same period paint a more alarming picture. Nursing and midwifery vacancies in all English NHS trusts increased from 28,713 in December 2015 to 34,682 in December 2017 – a rise of 21%
- That overall figure masks some very large regional disparities – vacancy rates rose by a relatively modest 3% in North Central and East London and by 4% in Yorkshire and the Humber, and they actually fell in the North East by 8%
- But in other areas nursing vacancies increased rapidly – by 46% in the East of England and by 48% in the North West
- The number of health care assistants, however, increased more rapidly albeit from a much lower base – from 103,797 in 2015 to 110,450 in 2017, a rise of 6.5%
- To put it another way, for every additional nurse hired over those two years, almost four extra health care assistants were appointed
- This means that almost three in ten (29%) care roles in NHS trusts in England are now being carried out by health care assistants, with the biggest proportions in mental health (34%) and, regionally, in the East Midlands (35%)

## Analysis

Although nursing numbers appear to be holding up, the sharp increase in vacancies tells a different story. They have soared by over a fifth in two years – although there are significant regional variations. As the country's ageing population has risen, demand for more care and more complex care has increased. There are 2,200 more emergency admissions per day than there were five years ago, for instance, 31% more diagnostic tests, while delays due to waiting for available home care have more than doubled.

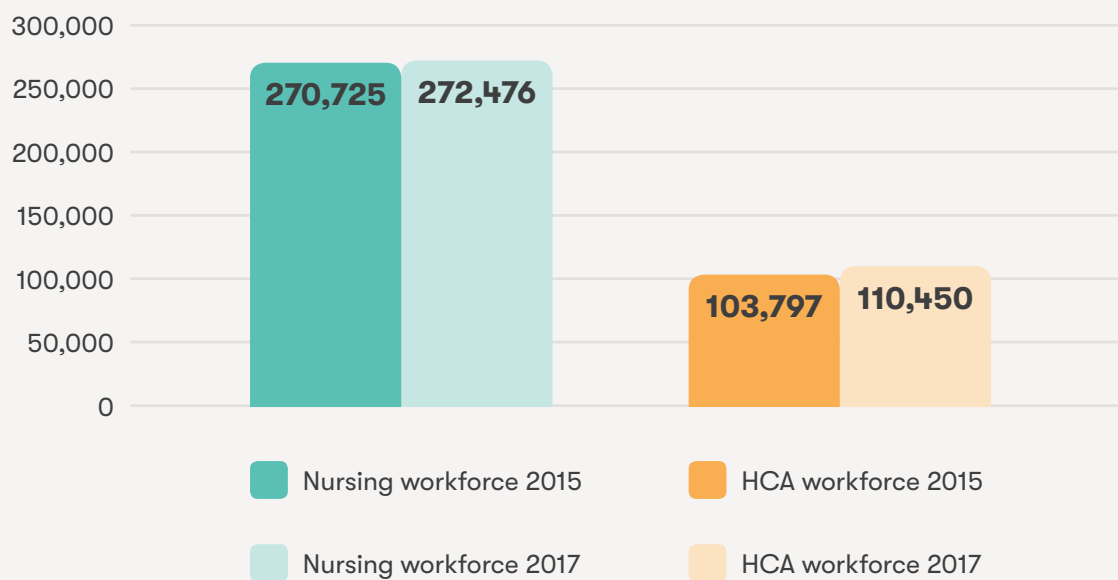
Unfortunately, supply hasn't increased in line with that demand – hence the shortfall in recruitment and the rise in use of agency nurses, which increased by 37% between December 2015 and December 2017.

To plug that care gap, trusts are increasingly turning to health care assistants, whose numbers have grown substantially. How far that trend goes, and how far trusts look at other routes to qualification such as apprenticeships, remains to be seen.

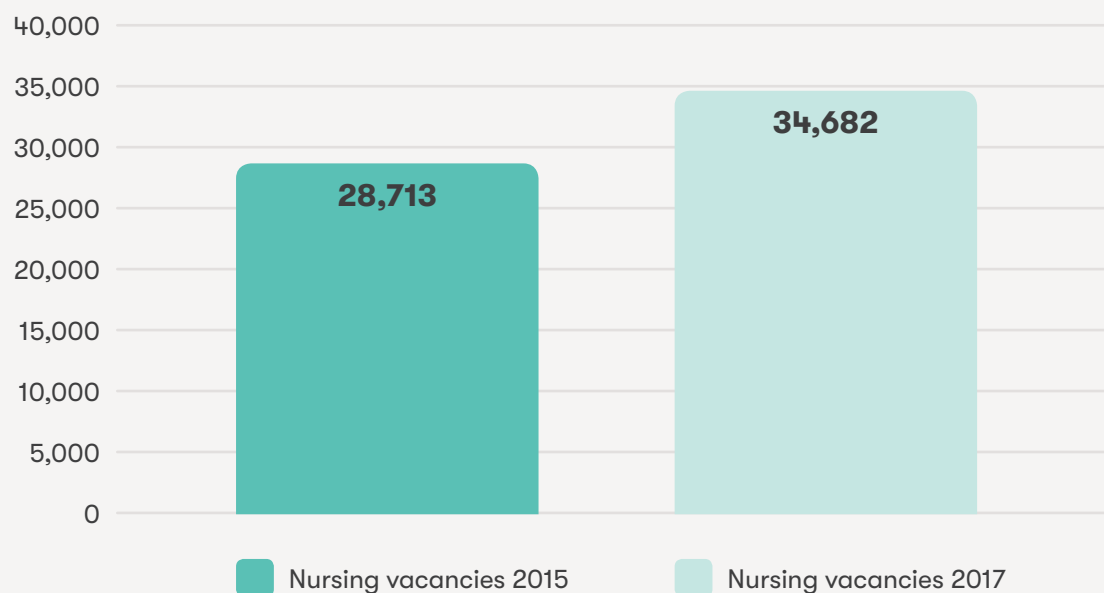




**Nurse and HCA numbers 2015-17**



**Nurse vacancy rates 2015-17**



# Is gender an issue?

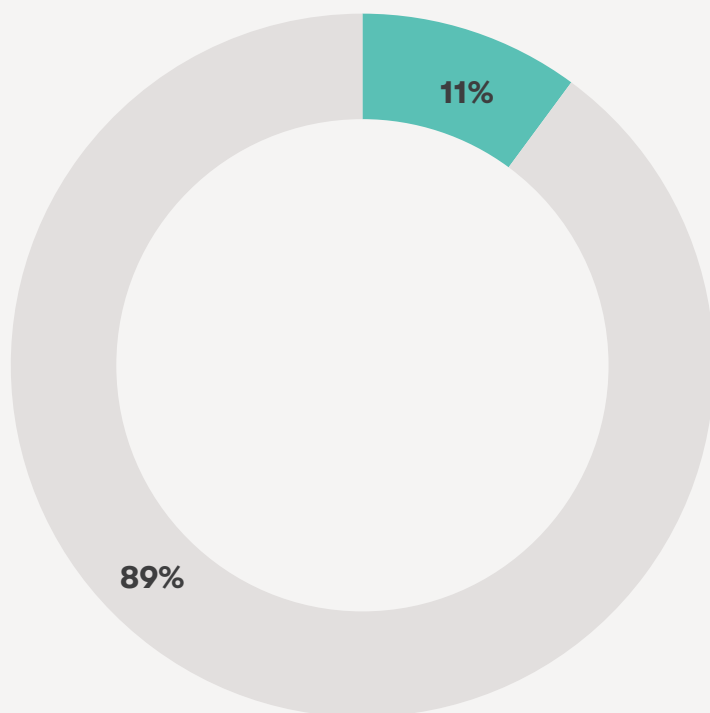
- There were 30,266 male nurses in responding trusts in December 2015, only 11% of the total nursing workforce
- That number had risen slightly to 30,605 by December 2017
- The number of male HCAs has increased from 18,934 in December 2015 to 20,055 in December 2017, an increase of 6%
- Overall, men account for almost one in five (18%) of the HCA workforce
- Those overall totals conceal some big regional differences. In the East of England, for instance, the drop in the number of male nurses was 5.5%. Conversely, Kent, Surrey and Sussex actually saw a rise of 5% while the numbers of male nurses in North Central and East London rose 10.5%
- Male health care assistant numbers rose in the North West by 10.5% and by an astonishing 33.5% in North Central and East London, where they now make up more than a quarter (26.5%) of all HCAs

## Analysis

The proportion of male nurses in the NHS has hardly changed in the past decade, with the percentage hovering around the 11% mark. These latest figures suggest the proportion is barely changing. Several studies have highlighted why gender stereotypes are hampering recruitment of more male nurses, though the divergent numbers regionally suggest some trusts are better at attracting men into nursing than others.

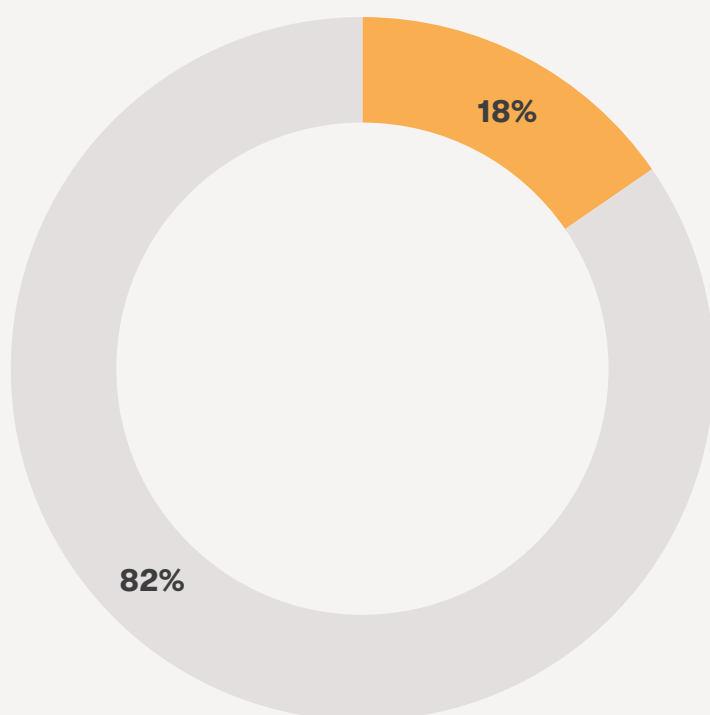
It's hard to escape the conclusion that trusts' nursing recruitment problems would be significantly eased if the NHS could attract more men into the profession. Interestingly, men seem to find health care assistant roles more amenable – the proportion of male HCAs is getting on for double that of nursing, one in five rather than one in ten.





### Nursing by gender, 2017

- Male nursing workforce
- Total nursing workforce



### HCAs by gender, 2017

- Male HCA workforce
- Total HCA workforce



# The East and Midlands.

## East Midlands

- More than nine in ten trusts (93%) responded
- Nurse numbers in the region fell 1% between 2015 and 2017, from 18,072 to 17,875, which included a 2.5% fall in the number of male nurses
- Nurse vacancy rates rose by 25% between 2015 and 2017, from 1,661 to 2,083
- Conversely, HCA numbers rose 4%, from 9,226 to 9,594, which included a 2% rise in the number of male HCAs
- Over a third of care staff (35%) in the region are now HCAs – the largest proportion in the country

## West Midlands

- More than four-fifths of trusts in the region (85%) responded
- Nurse numbers registered a small fall of 0.5% between 2015 and 2017 from 28,806 to 28,702, which included a 0.5% fall in the number of male nurses
- Nurse vacancy rates rose by 21% between 2015 and 2017 from 2,348 in 2015 to 2,842
- HCA numbers rose slightly by 2% between 2015 to 2017, from 12,845 to 13,080, but the proportion who were male fell by 3%
- Just under a third (31%) of care staff in the region are HCAs

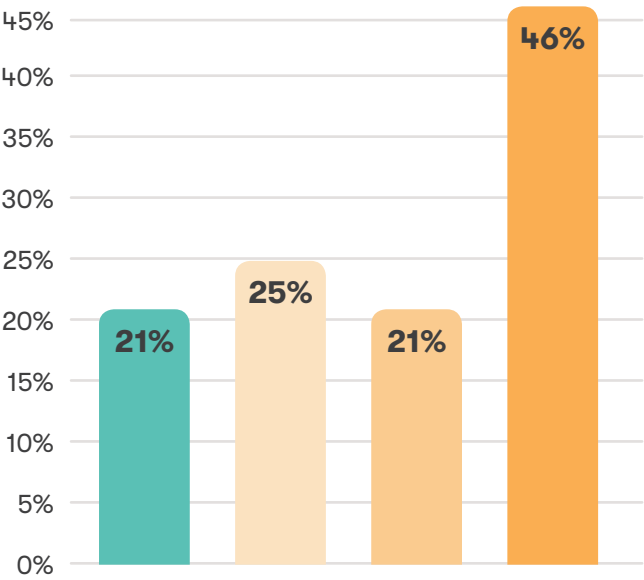
## East of England

- Three-quarters (83%) of trusts in the region responded
- Nurse numbers rose slightly between 2015 and 2017 – from 21,328 to 21,462 – but they included a relatively large 5.5% fall in male nurse numbers
- But nurse vacancy rates soared by 46% from 3,014 in 2015 to 4,393 in 2017, one of the biggest rises in any region
- Conversely, HCA numbers rose by 5% from 8,325 in 2015 to 8,759 in 2017, which included a 5.5% rise in male HCA numbers
- Almost one in three (29%) of care staff in the region are HCAs

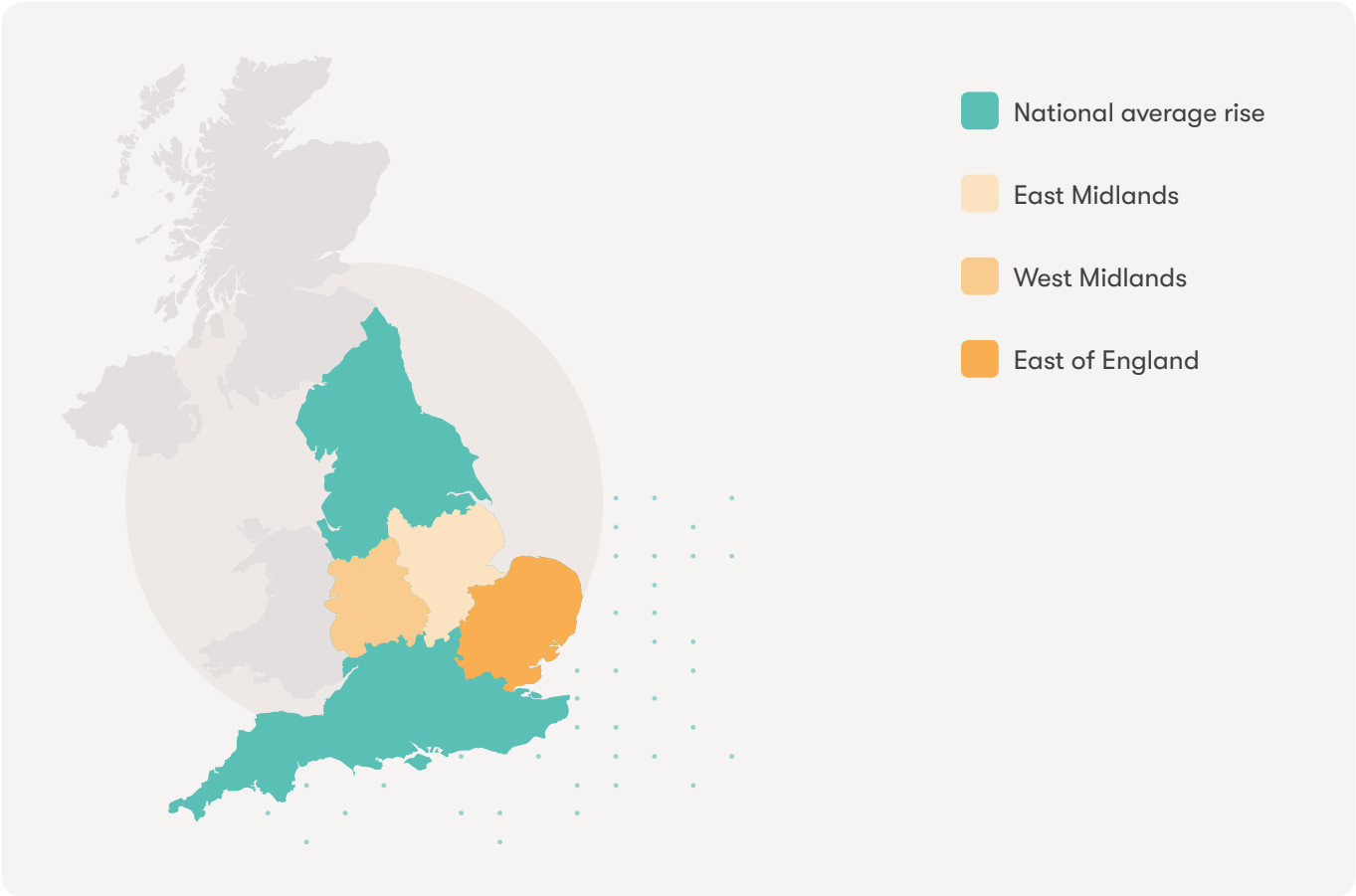
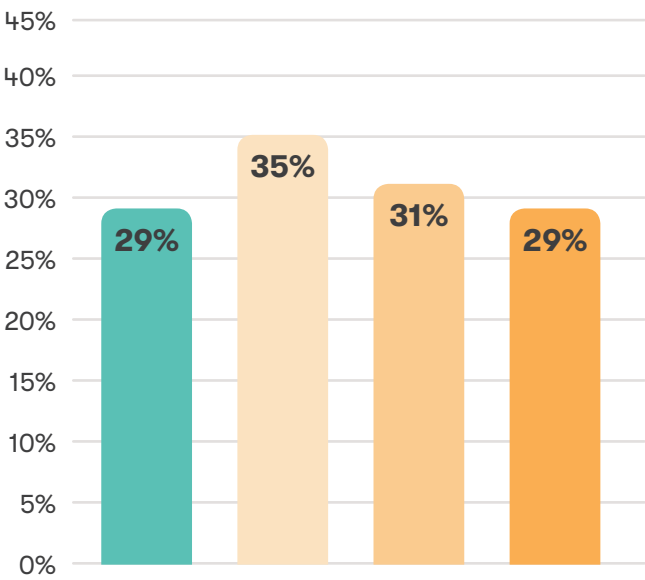
## Analysis

Overall numbers of nurses and health care assistants in the Midlands and East of England are broadly in line with national trends. The main outlier is the East of England, which has the highest proportion of care staff who are HCAs in the country and which registered the second biggest increase in nurse vacancy rates. The second finding could of course help explain the first.

Nurse vacancy rates



% of care workers who are HCAs



# The South outside London.

## Kent, Surrey and Sussex

- Almost nine in ten trusts (88%) in the region responded
- Nurse numbers fell 2.5% between 2015 and 2017 from 23,072 to 22,473, but male nurse numbers bucked that trend and actually rose by 5%
- Nurse vacancy rates rose 7% between 2015 and 2017 from 3,264 to 3,489, well below the national average
- HCA numbers increased strongly from 8,089 in 2015 to 8,721 in 2017, a rise of 8%, which included a 3% rise in male HCA numbers
- Almost three in ten (28%) of care staff in the region are HCAs

## South West

- Well over four-fifths of trusts (84%) responded
- Nurse numbers rose slightly by 2% between 2015 and 2017 from 17,824 to 18,130, which included a 4% rise in male nurses
- Nurse vacancy rates rose 9% during the period from 1,870 to 2,044, which was well below the national average
- Conversely, the numbers of HCA numbers rose 12%, from 7,205 in 2015 to 8,068 in 2017, almost double the national average. That included a 5% rise in the number of male HCAs
- Three in ten care staff in the South West (31%) are now HCAs

## Thames Valley

- All trusts in the region responded
- Nursing numbers fell 4% between 2015 and 2017 from 10,620 to 10,185, though the proportion of male nurses remained unchanged
- Nurse vacancy rates increased markedly, from 1,427 in 2015 to 1,902 in 2017, a rise of 33%
- However, HCA numbers increased by 4% during the period, from 3,546 to 3,690, which included a rise of 8% in male HCA numbers
- Just over a quarter of care staff (26.5%) in the region are HCAs

## Wessex

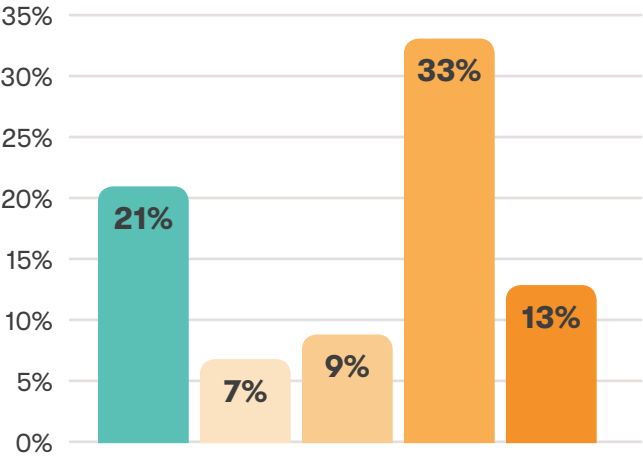
- All trusts in the region responded
- Nurse numbers fell by 0.5% between 2015 and 2017 from 14,904 to 14,808, though the proportion of male nurses stayed virtually static
- Nurse vacancy rates rose by 13% during the period, from 1,864 to 2,101
- HCA numbers increased by 5.5% from 6,166 in 2015 to 6,503 in 2017, which included a 4% rise in male HCA numbers
- Three in ten care staff in Wessex (30.5%) are now HCAs

## Analysis

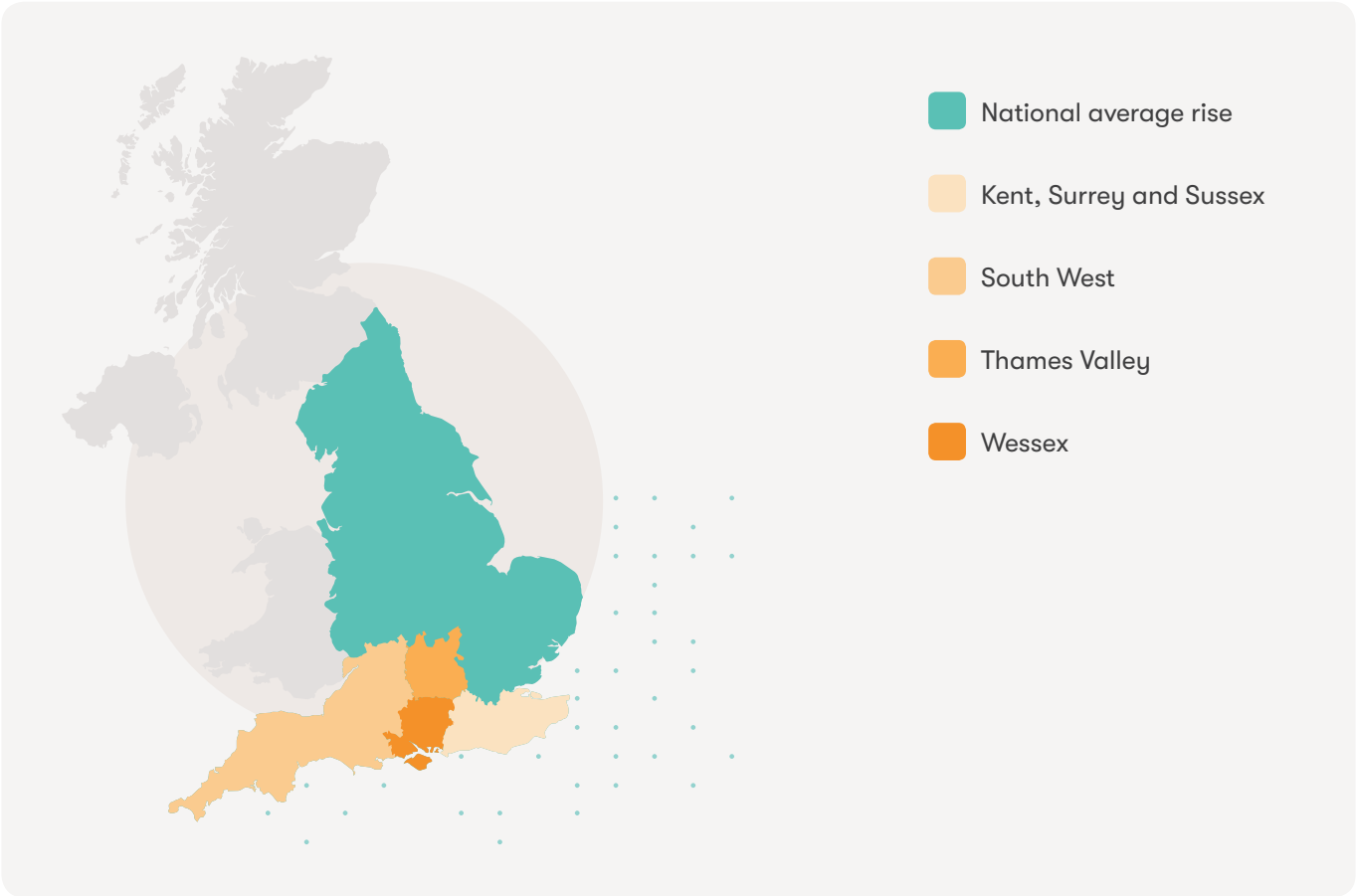
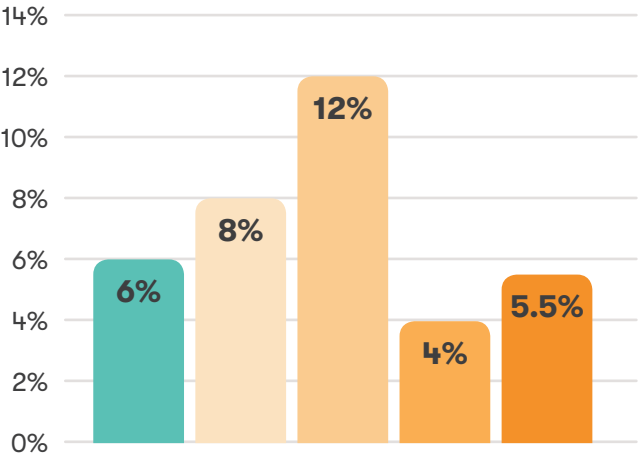
Nursing numbers across the South tended to be slightly lower than the national average between 2015 and 2017. Perhaps surprisingly then, nurse vacancy rates rose at a much lower rate, with the exception of Thames Valley, which saw a significant increase. Two of the four areas – South West and Kent, Surrey and Sussex – also registered an increase in the proportion of male nurses and one – Thames Valley – saw a big jump in the number of male HCAs.



Nurse vacancy rates



HCA numbers



# The North.

## North East

- Nine in ten trusts in the region (90%) responded
- Nurse numbers fell slightly by 0.5% between 2015 and 2017 from 19,001 to 18,885, which included a 0.5% fall in the proportion of male nurses
- Nurse vacancy rates actually fell during the period by 8% – from 760 in 2015 to 701 in 2017 – the only decrease in the country
- HCA numbers rose 4% from 7,338 in 2015 to 7,634 in 2017, which included a 2.5% fall in the numbers of male HCAs
- Almost three in ten (29%) care staff in the region are HCAs

## North West

- More than nine in ten trusts in the region (92%) responded
- Nursing numbers rose by 2% between 2015 and 2017 from 42,368 to 43,192, which included a 2.5% increase in the numbers of male nurses
- However, nurse vacancy rates soared by 48% over the two years, the biggest increase in the country
- HCA numbers rose by 6% between 2015 and 2017 from 16,077 to 17,073, which included a 10.5% rise in male HCAs
- Almost three in ten care staff (28%) in the region are HCAs

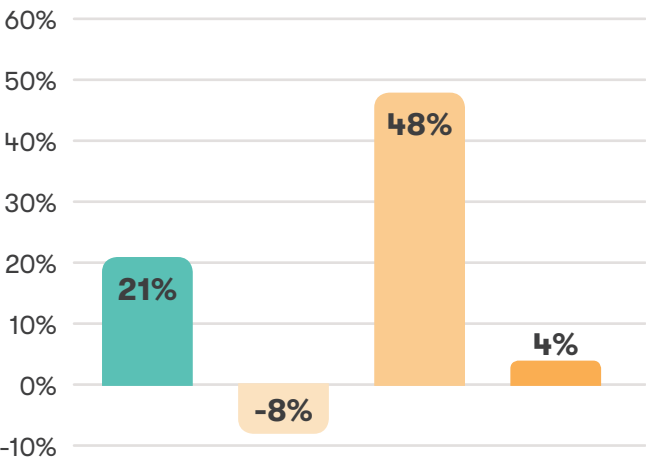
## Yorkshire and the Humber

- More than nine in ten trusts (95%) responded
- Nursing numbers fell by 1% between 2015 and 2017 from 30,665 to 30,373, which included a 6% decline in male nurse numbers
- But nurse vacancy rates have risen only marginally by 4% from 1,836 in 2015 to 1,907 in 2017 – one of the smallest rises in the country
- HCA numbers rose by 5.5% between 2015 and 2017 from 12,625 to 13,337, which included a 3.5% rise in male HCAs
- Three in ten (30.5%) of care staff are HCAs

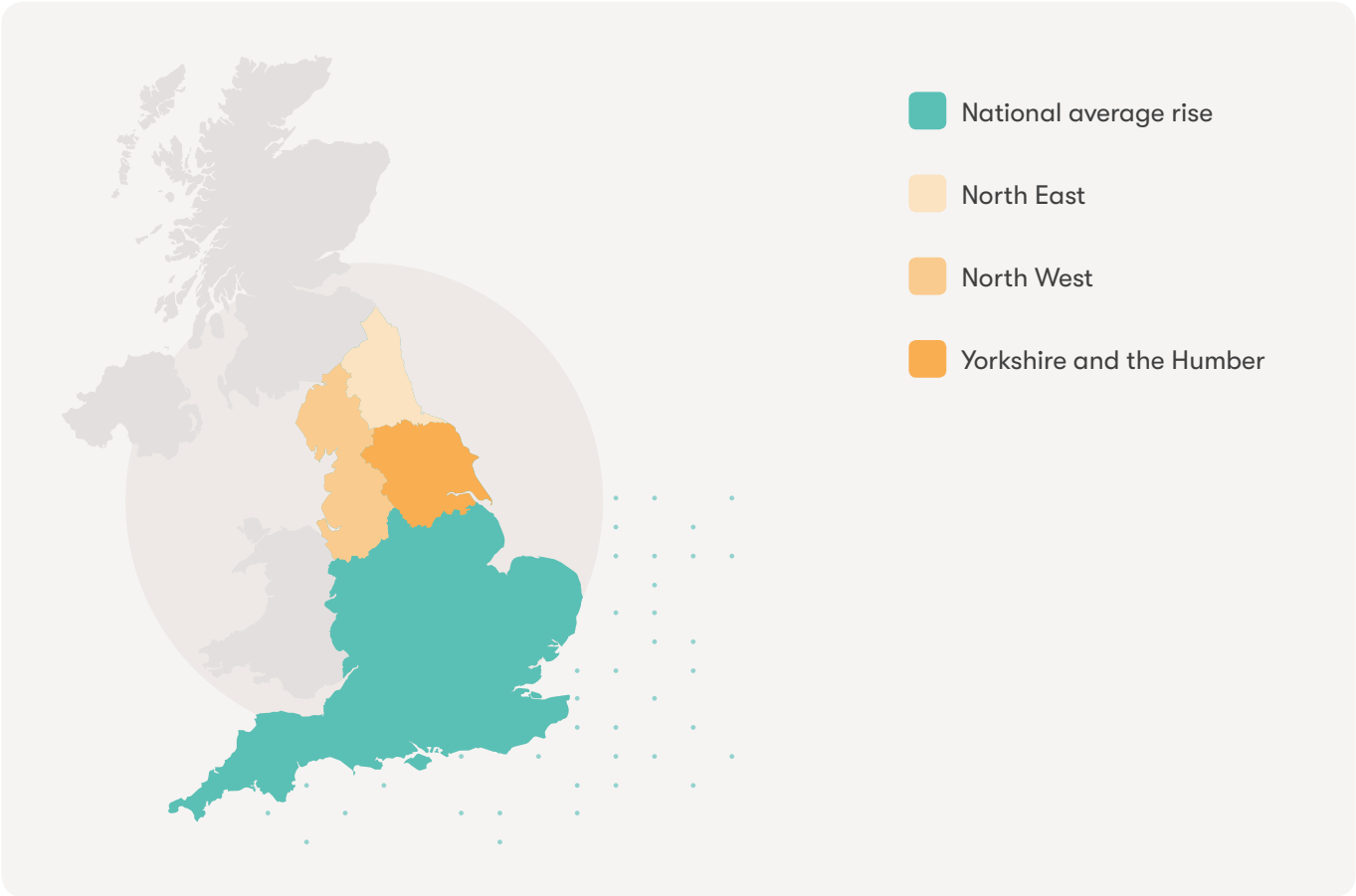
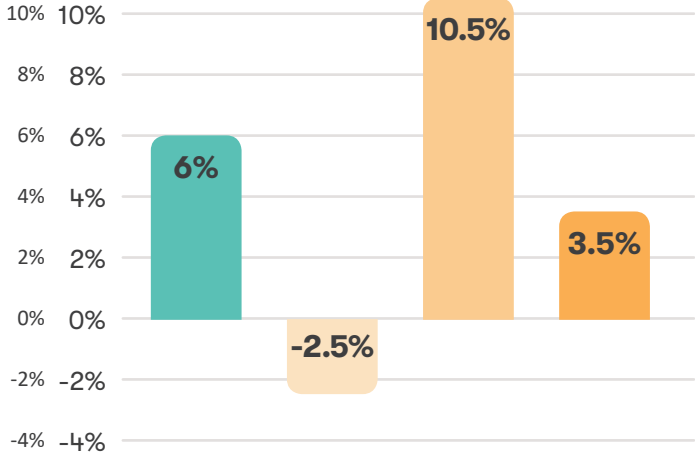
## Analysis

Trusts across the North are a study in contrasts. Although absolute nursing numbers are in line with the national average, the North West saw the biggest increase in nursing vacancies in the country while the North East witnessed the only fall.

Nurse vacancy rates



% rise in male HCAs





# London.

## North Central and East London

- Four-fifths of trusts (80%) responded
- Nurse numbers rose by 6% between 2015 and 2017 – from 20,090 to 21,340, the second biggest increase in the country. It included an impressive 10.5% increase in the proportion of male nurses
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, the 3% rise in nurse vacancy rates was also one of the lowest in the country. It inched up from 2,818 in 2015 to 2,895 in 2017
- HCA numbers also increased rapidly by 18% from 6,098 in 2015 to 7,248 in 2017, which included a huge 33.5% rise in the proportion of men
- A quarter of care staff (25%) are now HCAs

## North West London

- Nine in ten trusts in the region (90%) responded
- Nurse numbers rose by 7.5% between 2015 and 2017 – from 7,736 to 8,328 – the biggest increase in the country, which included a 4% rise in male nurses
- Nurse vacancy rates increased by 15% in those two years, from 2,229 to 2,571
- HCA numbers rose by 5.5% from 2,484 in 2015 to 2,616 in 2017, which included a 2.5% rise in male HCAs
- Almost a quarter of care staff (24%) are HCAs

## South London

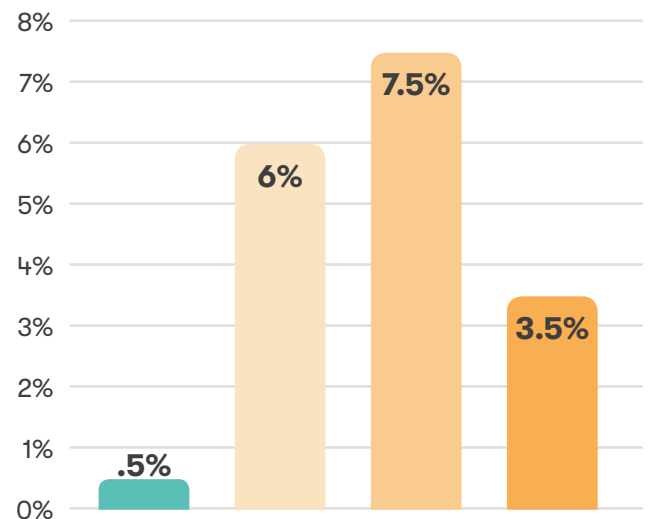
- Eight in ten trusts (80%) responded
- Nurse numbers rose by 3.5% between 2015 and 2017 from 15,437 to 15,949, which included a 5.5% rise in male nurses
- Nurse vacancy rates rose by 28% during the period from 1,690 to 2,156
- HCA numbers increased by 9.5% from 3,401 in 2015 to 3,729 in 2017, which included a 4% rise in male HCAs
- Under a fifth of care staff (19%) are HCAs, the lowest proportion in the country

## Analysis

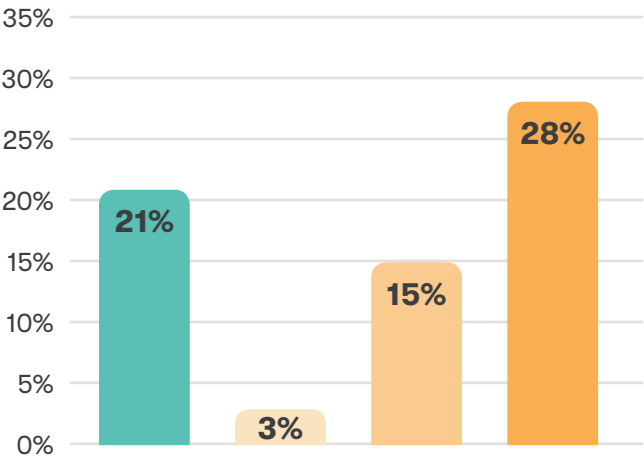
The capital's regions all reported a rise in nursing numbers, and equally impressive growth in HCA numbers – with one trust registering an increase more than four times the national average. However, London trusts have tended to employ proportionately fewer HCAs than those elsewhere in the country, so the increases are to some extent catching up with the national trend.

Nurse vacancy rate rises across all London regions were comparatively low, averaging out at 11%, half the national average. Interestingly, one trust – North East and Central London – increased the proportion of male HCAs by a huge 33.5% over two years.

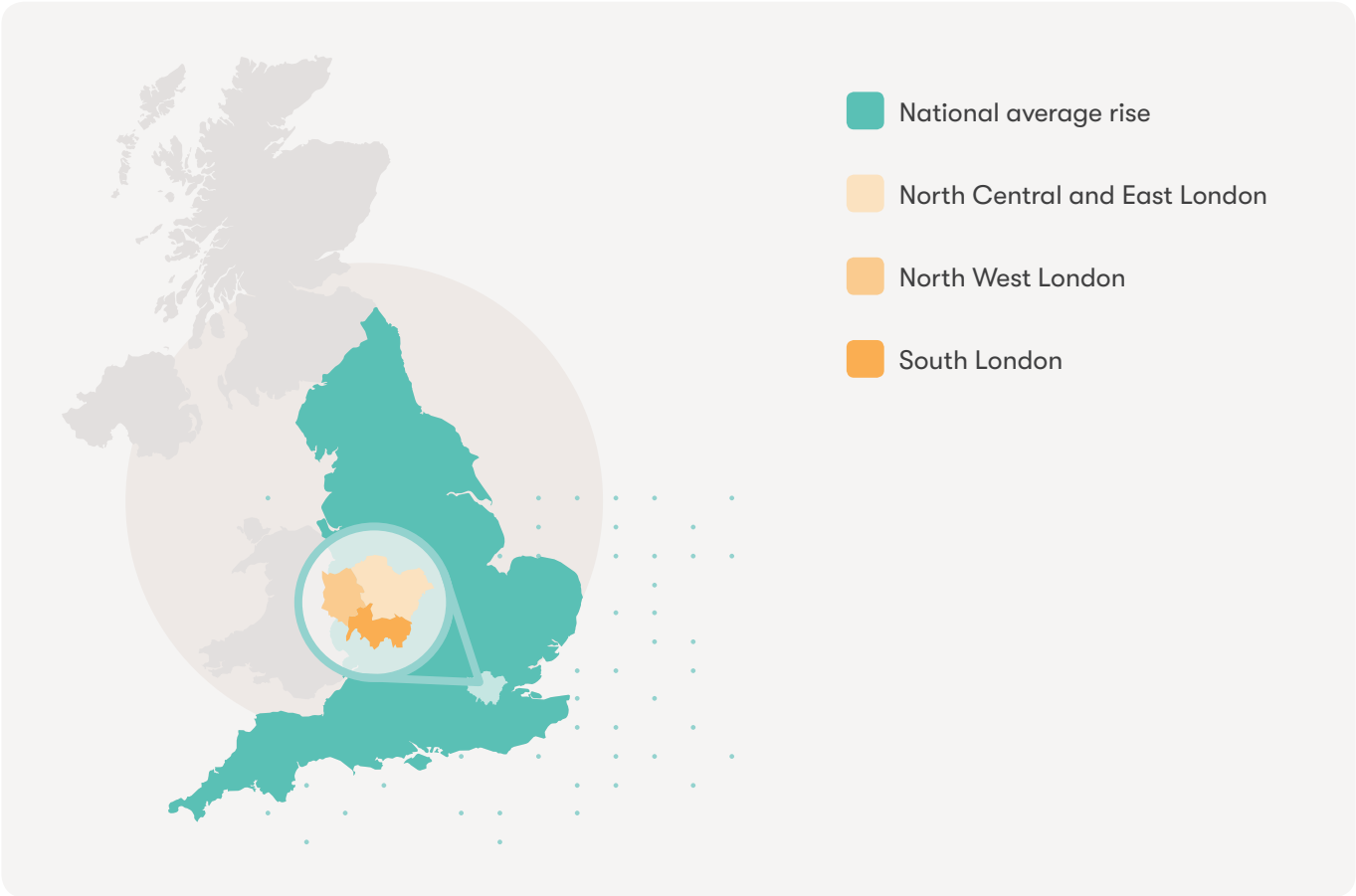
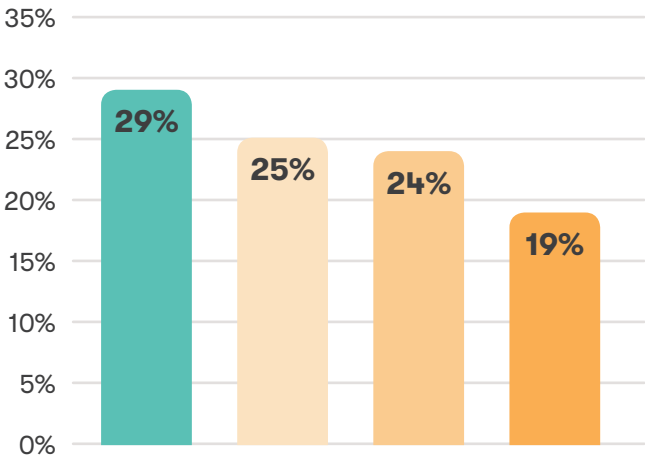
## Increase in nurse numbers 2015-17



Nurse vacancy rates



% of care workers who are HCAs



# How do staff numbers vary by type of trust?

## Acute trusts

- Almost nine in ten acute trusts (88%) responded
- Nursing numbers rose by 1% between 2015 and 2017 from 197,542 to 199,983, which included a 3% rise in male nurses
- Nurse vacancy rates over the same period increased by 25% from 19,805 to 24,697
- HCA numbers increased substantially by 8.5% from 69,816 in 2015 to 75,672 in 2017, which included an 8% rise in male HCAs
- Just under three in ten care staff in acute trusts (27.5%) are now HCAs

## Community provider trusts

- Over four-fifths of trusts (84%) responded
- The sector saw a big drop in nurse numbers of 9% between 2015 and 2017 from 17,794 to 16,161, which included a 4.5% fall in male nurse numbers
- Nurse vacancy rates rose during those two years but only by 1% from 1,965 to 1,990
- HCA numbers declined by 3.5% between 2015 and 2017 from 6,333 to 6,115, but the proportion of male HCAs rose by 6%
- Just under three in ten care staff in acute trusts (27.5%) are now HCAs

## Mental health trusts

- Nine in ten trusts (92%) responded
- Nurse numbers rose by 1.5% between 2015 and 2017 from 55,389 to 56,331, which included a slight 1.5% decline in the numbers of male nurses
- Nurse vacancy rates increased by 16.5% over the same period from 6,478 to 7,546
- HCA numbers rose slightly by 3.5% from 27,647 to 28,662, which included a 3.5% rise in male HCAs
- Over a third (34%) of mental trust care staff are HCAs

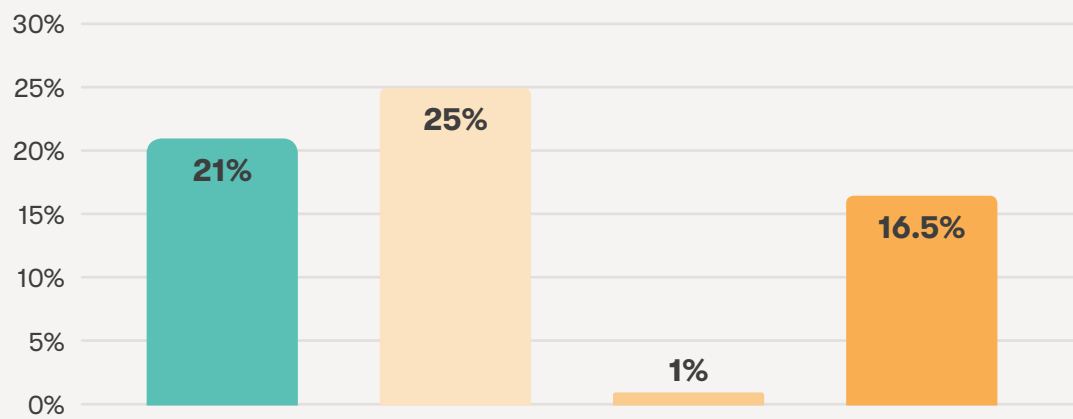
## Analysis

The recruitment picture in acute trusts closely mirrors national trends, which is to be expected as they make up the bulk of all NHS trusts – though if anything the vacancy rates suggest this is where the staffing crisis is most severe.

Community trusts did post a significant decline in nursing numbers and, counterintuitively, very low vacancy rate increases, which could be a product of organisational mergers rather than any lessening of recruitment pressures. Interestingly, mental health trusts have the highest percentage of care staff who are HCAs.

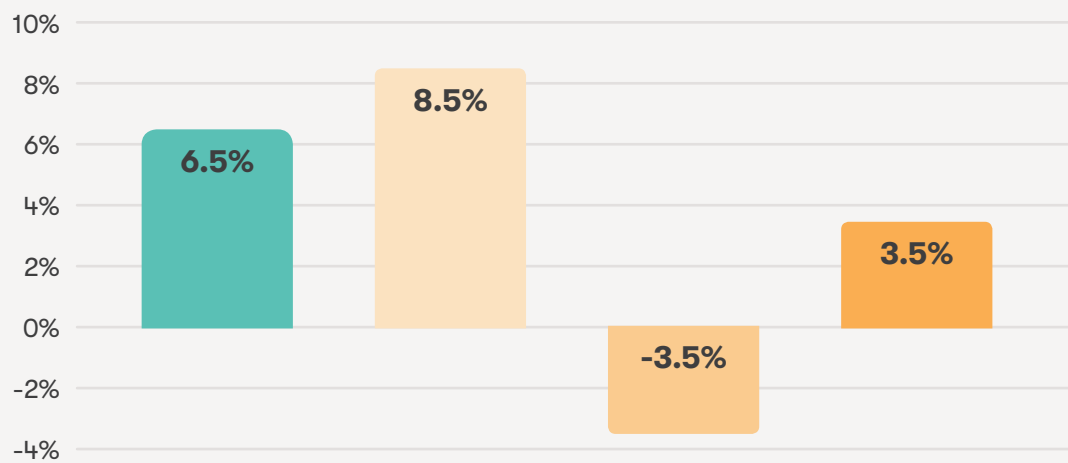


**Nurse vacancy rates**



 National average rise    Acute trusts    Community provider trusts    Mental health trusts

**Numbers of HCAs 2015-17**



## Notes.







BPP University is committed to delivering pioneering healthcare education.

Our programme portfolio lends itself to the enhancement of an inter-professional workforce within health and social care organisations and covers a multitude of disciplines.

We provide education for every field of practice including: adult, mental health, learning disability and children and young people.

Our innovative portfolio of programmes is designed to help organisations to achieve their workforce planning and personal goals, and as always, place the patient at their heart.

Combining the academic excellence of a university with a real-life focus – each and every one of our healthcare education programmes place service users, patients, friends, families and carers at their heart and are designed to help organisations achieve their vision; delivering exceptional care.

Working with our partners, we take the time to understand their challenges and ambitions, to ensure we tailor a learning plan that helps them achieve their vision and long term goals.

Whether it is; quality and performance, effective leadership and strategy development.

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