

EDUCATION

England drives record rise in student nurses despite falls in devolved nations

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Source: Ingimage

A record number of students have been accepted onto nursing courses across the UK for 2021. A breakdown of the latest data shows a drop in incoming students in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Today the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has published its latest [analysis](#) for 2021 which revealed 26,730 people have been accepted onto nursing courses across the UK - a 10% increase from 2020.

“There are already significant staff shortages in nursing and it is clear acceptance numbers are still not keeping pace with vacancies”

Patricia Marquis

But the Royal College of Nursing warned while the data was “encouraging”, acceptance numbers were “still not keeping pace with vacancies” across the profession.

In England, 20,930 students have been accepted onto nursing courses for 2021 – a rise of 11.5% from 2020 when 18,770 students were accepted.

The latest numbers are also 17% higher than 2016 levels (17,980 acceptances), which was the year courses were free for student nurses before the bursary was axed, leading to a subsequent decline in numbers.

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However, the picture does not appear so positive across the rest of the UK.

In Northern Ireland, the number of acceptances onto nursing courses has dropped by 11%, from 880 in 2020 to 780 in 2021.

In addition, there has been a fall of 3% in Scotland where there were 3,730 students accepted onto nursing courses for 2021, down from 3,830 in 2020.

Meanwhile, in Wales there was a marginal increase of less than 1%, with the number of acceptances up by just 10 people, from 1,280 students in 2020, to 1,290 students in 2021.

In terms of gender, across the UK, there was a 4% increase in the number of men placed onto nursing courses for 2021 and a 8.3% increase in women, compared with 2020.

Meanwhile, data on the age of those placed onto nursing courses showed an increase in mature students, but a slight drop among those in their early 20s.

Across the UK, there was a 22% increase in the number of 18-year-olds placed on nursing courses up from 5,850 in 2020 to 7,150 in 2021.

But there was a 8% drop among those aged 20, and a 2.5% fall among those aged 21-24, when compared with 2020 figures.

However, the number of those aged 25-29 placed onto nursing courses grew from 3,600 in 2020 to 3,820 in 2021 (6%).

There was also an 11% increase in those aged 30 to 34 – up from 2,530 in 2020 to 2,820 in 2021.

In addition, the number of students aged 35 and over who were accepted onto nursing courses climbed 5% – up from 4,890 in 2020 to 5,150 in 2021.



Patricia Marquis. Image credit: Harmer

In response to the new figures, RCN England director, Patricia Marquis, said: “This latest increase in acceptances to nursing courses is encouraging and is no doubt a result of the high profile and professionalism of nursing staff during the pandemic.

“But record numbers of acceptances does not equate to record numbers of nurses entering the workforce, as many of these students won’t qualify until 2024 and beyond.

“There are already significant staff shortages in nursing and it is clear acceptance numbers are not keeping pace with vacancies.”

She also warned that nursing staff were “exhausted” following the gruelling pressures of the 2019 pandemic.

“This not only puts patient care at risk but means students risk not completing their studies entering the workforce,” added Ms Marquis.

“As we build a better NHS and work to bust the backlog, these students are going to be the future of our greatest institution”

Sajid Javid

The RCN reiterated calls on the government to improve its 3% pay deal for NHS nurses to help with retention and ensure future nurses have the expert teaching they need.

Meanwhile, health and social care secretary

Sajid Javid said the record numbers of acceptances onto nursing courses showed how the hard work and dedication of health staff during the pandemic had “inspired the next generation in our service”.

“I’d like to congratulate the thousands of students who have achieved the A Level results needed to kickstart their careers in the health and social care sector,” he added.

“As we build a better NHS and work to bust the backlog, these students are going to be the future of our greatest institution.”

The data provided by UCAS today covers students due to start courses this autumn, with a significant proportion due to start in January 2022, and has been released before the end of the clearing process.

Governments in the devolved nations were approached for comment.

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