

## Health Education England

### **Pandemic inspires 'future nurses' with a welcome increase in school and college leavers looking to enter the profession**

**Strictly embargoed to 00:01, Thursday 20 January 2022**

A record number of 18-year-olds applied to study nursing in England in 2021, with the COVID pandemic playing a significant factor in their decision to apply, according to a new UCAS report published today in collaboration with Health Education England (HEE).

This has been accompanied by an overall rise in the number of nursing applicants across all ages, with a record 28,815 choosing a nursing course in England as their first choice through UCAS. The pandemic has shone a positive spotlight on the profession and raised the public profile of nursing. This, together with the introduction of the [Learning Support Fund](#), promotion of nursing careers through the award-winning We are the NHS campaign, and an investment of £55 million into practice placements, has contributed to the increase in applications to study nursing.

The number of 18 year olds choosing to study nursing has increased by 38%, to reach 7,105, since 2019. This led to a 43% increase in the number with a confirmed place to 6,510 students. This significant growth came as the UK's overall 18 year old population rose by just 2% during the same time.

The demand from mature applicants, those aged 21 and over, also remains strong, with the number of applicants choosing nursing as their first choice up over a third (+34%) since 2019 to reach 17,415.

In today's report *Next Steps: Who are the 'future nurses'?*, it is estimated that since the World Health Organisation declared the global pandemic in March 2020, over 56,000 people have started an undergraduate nursing course, degree apprenticeship or trainee nursing associate programme.

More than two-thirds (69%) of applicants said that the pandemic inspired them to apply to study to become a nurse, with around 1 in 10 identifying the pandemic as the most important factor in their decision, and 1 in 4 stating that current healthcare personnel were the most significant influencer. Moreover, 99% of 2021 nursing

applicants surveyed said they were confident that they had made the right decision to study nursing.

UCAS has also seen a surge in demand for information on nursing apprenticeships through the UCAS apprenticeship platform [CareerFinder](#) over the last twelve months, with nearly 30,000 people searching for nursing apprenticeships. According to [national data](#), the numbers starting nursing degree apprenticeships doubled to over 2,000 in the past year, despite widespread falls in wider apprenticeship starts during the pandemic.

**Key findings from today's report include:**

- *A 'positive equality gap'.* Nursing joins education and health and social care courses as one of only three subjects where more young people from the most disadvantaged areas in the UK choose to study nursing than their most advantaged counterparts.
- *More geographically mobile 'future nurses' start their training.* Driven by the increase in younger applicants to nursing, there was a 51% uplift in aspiring nurses starting courses outside an hour and a half radius from home. This has the potential to address geographic 'cold spots'.
- *Mental health nursing receives a welcome boost.* 30% more students applied for mental health nursing courses compared to 2019. This comes after UCAS [reported](#) a 450% increase in the number of mental health declarations in the UCAS application over the last decade.
- *A stark gender gap.* Men remain an untapped source for nurses, with women more than 9 times more likely to choose and be placed on nursing courses. The application gap rises to 57 times more likely for children's nursing courses.
- *EU demand holds firm* - demand for nursing courses from EU applicants rose by 6%, in stark contrast to the overall fall of 42% in EU applications to English courses.

**UCAS Chief Executive Clare Marchant said:** "It is incredibly heartening to see that one of the positive legacies of the work of our incredible healthcare workers during the pandemic is that more of our young people have been inspired to enter the nursing profession, particularly when they are arguably the ones who have been most impacted, both in terms of their education and way of life.

"This, coupled with a continuing strong demand from mature applicants, and a surge in interest for information on nursing associates and degree apprenticeships via UCAS' apprenticeship platform [CareerFinder](#) has resulted in record numbers of students embarking on their individual journeys to become a nurse in England since the pandemic began.

“As we approach next week’s deadline for applications for 2022 entry (26 January), we can expect that this wave of increased demand for nursing education and training opportunities will show no signs of waning.”

**Dr Ruth May, Chief Nursing Officer for NHS England, said:** “The last couple of years, difficult as they have been, have shone a spotlight on the value of our nursing profession and the rewarding careers on offer in every corner of the NHS. We are thrilled to see tens of thousands of applications – and a record number of acceptances – to study nursing and are delighted by the contribution of the close partnership between UCAS and our ‘We are the NHS’ recruitment campaign to these results.

“As these nurses of the future will find throughout their careers, the NHS offers the opportunity to have an experience like no other and I urge everyone to search NHS careers to find out more.”

**Professor Mark Radford CBE, Chief Nurse at Health Education England and Deputy Chief Nursing Officer for NHS England, said:** “We can see from this report that the focus on the contribution of nurses and nursing throughout the pandemic has played a part in increasing the number of people considering a career in nursing.

“Health Education England, UCAS, universities, and practice placement providers have also contributed by promoting nursing careers and increasing the number of practice placements available to support nursing students, enabling them to join the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register and take up roles within our services as critical thinking professionals. Our work with NHS England and NHS Improvement on the award-winning We are the NHS campaign has also shone a light on the opportunities a career in nursing can bring.

“This report provides other fascinating insights into our future nurses. The insights from this work will support us, and our partners in the health and care system, to continue to build a nursing workforce that is highly skilled, critically thinking, and with the right values.”

**Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, said:**

“I’m thrilled that a record number of 18-year-olds applied to study careers in nursing in 2021, with the extraordinary achievements of staff during the pandemic inspiring a new generation to become the future of our health and care services.

“We are on track to recruit 50,000 more nurses by the end of this Parliament and we are supporting all eligible nursing students with a training grant worth at least £5,000 a year. I urge anyone who wants a fulfilling career in the NHS to apply next year.”

An embargoed copy of the report can be accessed [here](#), or by contacting the press office to request a pdf.

#### **Ends**

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#### **Notes for editors**

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is an independent charity, and the UK's shared admissions service for higher education.

Our services support young people making post-18 choices, as well as mature learners, by providing information, advice, and guidance to inspire and facilitate educational progression to university, college or an apprenticeship. We manage almost three million applications, from around 700,000 people each year, for full-time undergraduate courses at over 380 universities and colleges across the UK.

We also provide a wide range of research, consultancy and advisory services to schools, colleges, careers services, professional bodies and employers, including apprenticeships.

We're a successful and fast-growing organisation, which helps hundreds of thousands of people every year. We're committed to delivering a first-class service to all of our customers — they're at the heart of everything we do.

#### About Health Education England

Health Education England was established on 28 June 2012, working as a shadow Special Health Authority from 1 October 2012. It took on its full operational responsibilities from 1 April 2013. It has five national functions: providing national leadership on planning and developing the healthcare and public health workforce; promoting high quality education and training that is responsive to the changing needs of patients and local communities, including responsibility for ensuring the effective delivery of important national functions such as medical trainee recruitment; ensuring security of supply of the health and public health workforce; appointing and supporting the development of LETBs; and allocating and accounting for NHS education and training resources and the outcomes achieved.

Health Education England aims to be the best place to work and embedding a culture that is transparent, diverse and inclusive is the best way to ensure we deliver for front line health and care learners and staff in this challenging environment

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