General Practice
GP Workforce and practice list sizes 2007–2017
Publication date – 12 December 2017
Introduction

This publication presents data on the General Practitioner (GP) workforce contracted to work in Scottish practices in the years 2007 to 2017. It provides information about both the number of GPs and GP practices in Scotland and number of patients registered at these practices.

Note that GP workforce information is only available as a headcount; an estimate of the whole time equivalent of GPs for 2015 can be found in the National Primary Care Workforce Survey 2015 publication. The results from the 2017 Survey will be published in 2018.

For workforce information on all medical staff employed directly by the NHS, please see the NHS Scotland Workforce publications.

It is important to note that this general practice data is sourced from a dynamic, administrative database; figures for a given year may differ slightly from previous published data where information has been corrected or updated.
Main points

- The number of women GPs has continued to rise; 60% of GPs were female at September 2017.

- A third of all GPs are aged 50 and over.

- The number (headcount) of GPs in Scotland has remained at around 4,900 since 2008. The number of GPs increased steadily in the years prior to 2008.

- The most recent estimate for whole time equivalent of GPs can be found in the National Primary Care Workforce Survey 2015.

- The number of patients registered with GP practices continues to rise slowly year on year and has increased by 5% since 2007.

- The number of patients aged 65+ has increased by 20% since 2007.

- The number of practices in Scotland decreased by 7% since 2007, reflecting a trend towards larger practices.
General Practitioners

There were 4,920 GPs working in General Practices in Scotland at 30 September 2017. This has remained at around 4,900 since 2008.

Note that these figures are headcounts of GPs rather than whole time equivalent (WTE).

GP age and gender

At 30 September 2017, the number of female GPs in post was 2,935 (60% of all GPs) compared with 1,985 males (40%). Figure 1 shows a shift in gender profile over the last 10 years, with females now accounting for the majority of the GP workforce.

As these figures are headcounts, they do not reflect differences in part-time hours. The National Primary Care Workforce Survey 2015 contains estimates for WTE of GPs and found that female GPs were more likely to work part-time than male GPs.

Figure 2 shows that there are also differences in the age profiles of male and female doctors. A high proportion of doctors under 40 years old are female, while there are more doctors over 50 who are male.
More detailed information on the age and gender profile of the GP workforce is provided in the accompanying spreadsheet Table 1: Number of GPs in Scotland by age, designation & gender, 2007-2017.

GP designations

In line with legislation that came into effect on 1 April 2004, GPs are collectively termed 'Performers'. These can be broken down into further sub-categories or designations as follows:

- Performer: a GP who has entered into a contract to provide services to patients and is effectively self-employed; usually a practice partner.
- Performer salaried: A GP who is employed by the practice or NHS Board on a salaried basis.
- Performer retainee: A GP, typically part-time, who can be utilised by a practice as required.
- Performer registrar, also known as Specialist Trainee: A medical practitioner who is being trained in general practice.

Figure 3 shows the number of GPs by designation between 2007 and 2017. The majority of GPs in 2017 were classed as performers (see the Glossary for definitions). This number has decreased over the last five years, with a corresponding increase in the number of salaried performers. Note that some GPs may hold multiple posts simultaneously and therefore the total GP headcount for Scotland is slightly less than the sum of the designations.
Note that GP trainees in the first two years of their training (eg those in foundation programmes) are typically not included in the numbers provided here.

More detailed information on the number of GPs in each designation can be found in the accompanying spreadsheets to this publication.
General Practices and their patients

General Practice Trends

Figure 4 shows the decreasing trend in the number of practices, which along with the overall increase in the general practice population (which can be seen from figure 5 below) has led to an increase in average practice list size. This is largely driven by practice mergers and a trend towards larger practices with more GPs serving a larger number of patients. As discussed in the previous section, the overall headcount of GPs in Scotland has remained at around 4,900 since 2008.

![Figure 4: Number of GP practices in Scotland, 2017](source: General Practitioner Contractor Database (GPCD), ISD)

Figure 5 shows the relative change in the number of GP patients in each age category between 2007 and 2017. It is clear that there are considerably more older patients now than in 2007, which presents a significant challenge for primary care services. Older patients are more likely to have multi-morbidities, to require longer consultation times (including home visits), and to access GP services with greater frequency than younger patients.

![Figure 5: Change in the number of patients in each age group, 2007-2017](source: General Practitioner Contractor Database (GPCD), ISD)
Practice population by area

There is considerable variation in the number of patients registered at a given general practice across Scotland. Practice list sizes can range less than 200 patients in remote locations to over 20,000 in densely populated urban areas. Note that some specialist practices, which address the specific health needs of patients with challenging behaviour or homelessness, have list sizes less than 200.

Figure 6 shows the spread of practice list size in each NHS Board. Each dot represents a practice.

Figure 6: Practice list size by NHS Board, 2017

The average (or mean) practice list size in Scotland for 2017 is approximately 6,000 patients. Due to the wide range in practice list sizes, the average practice list size for Scotland is a limited measure.

Detailed information on the number of GP patients in each NHS board and council area, and by according to deprivation and urban/rural classification are available in the accompanying spreadsheets.
Additional Practice Information

Practice Contract Type

There are three types of General Practice contract in Scotland, in effect from 2004 as part of The Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act 2004:

- **GMS/17J**: A ‘GMS’ (General Medical Services) practice, also known as a ‘Section 17J’, is GP run and has a standard, nationally negotiated contract in place, with some flexibility to opt in or out of local and national enhanced services.

- **17C**: A ‘Section 17C’ practice is GP run and has a locally negotiated agreement between the NHS Board and the practice. This enables, for example, flexible provision of services in accordance with specific local circumstances.

- **2C**: An NHS Board run practice where all GPs and Practice staff are salaried to the local NHS Board.

The majority (81%) of practices in Scotland are run by GPs with a GMS/17J contract in place. Figure 7 shows the trends in practice type over the last 10 years.

![Figure 7: General Practice Contract types, 2007-2017](source: General Practitioner Contractor Database (GPCD), ISD)

Dispensing practices

Some practices in Scotland provide pharmaceutical services to their patients. These dispensing practices are more commonly found in remote, island and rural areas where the population is deemed too small to support an independent community pharmacy. More information about practices offering dispensing services and payments made can be found in the [NHS Payments to General Practice publication](#).
## Glossary

**CHI**  
The Community Health Index (CHI) is a population register, which is used in Scotland for health care purposes.

**GMS**  
General Medical Services is the term used to describe the range of healthcare that is provided by General Practitioners as part of the National Health Services.

**GPCD**  
General Practitioners Contractor Database. A centralised database of GP and general practice details, held at ISD but with data maintained by NHS Boards.

**GMS Database**  
General Medical Services database at ISD. A repository of historical GP and general practice details prior to 2005. An ongoing repository for practice patient list size information.

**Headcount**  
A count of the number of staff in post, regardless of whether individuals work full or part-time.

**Performer**  
A GP who has entered into a contract to provide services to patients and is effectively self-employed; usually a practice partner.

**Performer Retainee**  
A GP, typically part-time, who can be utilised by a practice as required.

**Performer Registrar/ST**  
A medical practitioner who is being trained in general practice. Also known as a Specialist Trainee.

**Performer Salaried**  
A GP who is employed by the practice or by the NHS Board on a salaried basis. Also known as a salaried GP.
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Further Information
Further information can be found on the ISD website

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Appendices

A1 – Background Information

General Medical Services (GMS) is the term used to describe the range of healthcare that is provided by General Practitioners (GPs or family doctors) as part of the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. The NHS specifies what GPs, as independent contractors, are expected to do and provides funding for this work through arrangements known as the General Medical Services Contract. Today, the GMS contract is a UK-wide arrangement with minor differences negotiated by each of the four UK health departments.

The GP figures reported in this publication do not include GPs who work only as locums or the majority of GPs who work only in Out of Hours services. The actual number of GPs working in Scotland is therefore higher than reported.

The GP workforce information in this publication is based on snapshots at 30 September for the years 2007 to 2017. Practice population files (CHI population registered at GP practices) are based on snapshots as at 30 September. Practice list size information is based on snapshots at 1 October for the years 2007 to 2017. These points were selected as they are the mid-points of each financial year.

Population Data

The population base is calculated using the Community Health Index (CHI). This is because the CHI population is based on patients registered at GP practices and it is the population to which GPs will refer when considering the services they provide to their patients. The CHI population register is inflated in comparison to NRS estimates and there is a difference of around 250,000 people when comparing the total sizes of the Scotland population reported. This is due to the following reasons:

- CHI will include people who have been given a CHI number but have since left the country to live for a period of time abroad.
- CHI will include overseas visitors who registered with a GP in Scotland or received screening services at a point in time during their visit.
- CHI will include students who have moved from Scotland during or after their studies but who have not registered elsewhere in the UK

Data Quality

Information on the GP workforce and the practices within which they work is collated and recorded routinely in an administrative database (GPCD) by NHS Boards in line with regulatory and operational requirements. This information is considered to have a high degree of overall accuracy.

Information on patients in GP practices is based on the CHI database, which is a register of all current and former patients in Scotland. A number of routine data quality checks are performed for this database, including checks against GP practice records.
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<td>Concepts and definitions</td>
<td>See Glossary and footnotes of Excel workbooks for further information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevance and key</td>
<td>Some 90% interactions with the health service are made through primary care. This publication makes information available to the Scottish Government and NHS Boards for planning and provision of primary care services. The data are used by epidemiologists to understand public health trends and by other researchers to understand the relationship of health and healthcare to other factors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>Information on the GP workforce and the practices within which they work is collated and recorded routinely by NHS Boards in line with regulatory and operational requirements. This information is therefore considered to have a high degree of overall accuracy. Maintenance of health service records on patients registered to practices is a core administrative function of the NHS and therefore the information on numbers of patients registered to each practice is expected to have a high degree of accuracy.</td>
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Comparability

Scottish GP workforce information is broadly comparable with GP workforce information for the other UK countries. However there are some variations in how the individual GP designations/contract types are described, and care must be taken to ensure that like for like groups are being compared (e.g. whether GP trainees or retainees are or are not included in each group being compared). The headcount information also takes no account of whether differing proportions of GPs in each country work on a full time or part time basis.

Information on the numbers of general practices and the numbers of patients registered to them is fairly closely comparable with that for other UK countries.

Information on the numbers of practice patients by deprivation group or urban/rural group is not directly comparable to information for other countries, as the classifications used to describe the deprivation or urban/rural status of populations are specific to Scotland.

Accessibility

It is the policy of ISD Scotland to make its web sites and products accessible according to published guidelines.

Coherence and clarity

Tables and charts are accessible via the ISD website at: http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/General-Practice/

Value type and unit of measurement

Numbers and percentages

Disclosure

The ISD protocol on Statistical Disclosure Protocol is followed.

Official Statistics designation

National Statistics

UK Statistics Authority Assessment


Last published 13 December 2016

Next published 11 December 2018

Date of first publication

Paper publications since 1970s; Web publications since 1996.

Help email nss.isdGeneralPractice@nhs.net

Date form completed
A3 – Early Access details (including Pre-Release Access)

Pre-Release Access
Under terms of the "Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008", ISD are obliged to publish information on those receiving Pre-Release Access ("Pre-Release Access" refers to statistics in their final form prior to publication). The standard maximum Pre-Release Access is five working days. Shown below are details of those receiving standard Pre-Release Access.

Standard Pre-Release Access:
- Scottish Government Health Department
- NHS Board Chief Executives
- NHS Board Communication leads
A4 – ISD and Official Statistics

About ISD

Scotland has some of the best health service data in the world combining high quality, consistency, national coverage and the ability to link data to allow patient based analysis and follow up.

Information Services Division (ISD) is a business operating unit of NHS National Services Scotland and has been in existence for over 40 years. We are an essential support service to NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government and others, responsive to the needs of NHS Scotland as the delivery of health and social care evolves.

Purpose: To deliver effective national and specialist intelligence services to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Scotland.

Mission: Better Information, Better Decisions, Better Health

Vision: To be a valued partner in improving health and wellbeing in Scotland by providing a world class intelligence service.

Official Statistics

Information Services Division (ISD) is the principal and authoritative source of statistics on health and care services in Scotland. ISD is designated by legislation as a producer of ‘Official Statistics’. Our official statistics publications are produced to a high professional standard and comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. The Code of Practice is produced and monitored by the UK Statistics Authority which is independent of Government. Under the Code of Practice, the format, content and timing of statistics publications are the responsibility of professional staff working within ISD.

ISD’s statistical publications are currently classified as one of the following:

- National Statistics (ie assessed by the UK Statistics Authority as complying with the Code of Practice)
- National Statistics (ie legacy, still to be assessed by the UK Statistics Authority)
- Official Statistics (ie still to be assessed by the UK Statistics Authority)
- other (not Official Statistics)

Further information on ISD’s statistics, including compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, and on the UK Statistics Authority, is available on the ISD website.

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and;
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.