General Practice

GP Workforce and practice list sizes
2009–2019

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3 December 2019
This is a National Statistics Publication

National Statistics status means that the official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value. They are identified by the quality mark shown above.

They comply with the Code of Practice for statistics and are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority’s regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

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Find out more about National Statistics at:
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Introduction

This publication presents data on the General Practitioner (GP) workforce contracted to work in Scottish practices in the years 2009 to 2019. 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 2017 can be found in the National Primary Care Workforce Survey 2017 publication.

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 these general practice data are 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

As at 30 September 2019:

- The headcount of GPs in Scotland is 5,049. This is a slight rise of 55 GPs compared to last year.

- This rise is predominantly in female GPs, who now make up 61% of GPs in Scotland. There has been little change in the number of male GPs since last year, who make up 39% of all GPs.

- The headcount of GPs remained roughly constant at around 4,900 between 2009 and 2017.

- 32% of all GPs are aged 50 and over, down from a high of 34% in 2014.

- The most recent estimate for whole time equivalent of GPs can be found in the National Primary Care Workforce Survey 2017.

As at 1 October 2019:

- The number of patients registered with GP practices continues to rise slowly year on year and has increased by 5% since 2009 to 5,770,000.

- The number of patients aged 65+ has increased by 21% since 2009 to 1,054,000.

- The number of practices in Scotland decreased by 9% from 1,023 practices in 2009 to 935, reflecting a trend towards larger practices with more GPs serving a larger number of patients.
General Practitioners

There were 5,049 GPs working in General Practices in Scotland at 30 September 2019. This is an increase of 55 compared to 2018. The number of GPs had remained roughly constant at around 4,900 between 2009 and 2017.

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

GP age and sex

At 30 September 2019, the number of female GPs in post was 3,099 (61% of all GPs) compared with 1,950 males (39%). Figure 1 shows a shift in sex profile over the last 10 years, with females now accounting for the majority of the GP workforce.

**Figure 1: Number of GPs in Scotland by sex, 2009-2019 (as at 30 September)**

![Number of GPs in Scotland by sex, 2009-2019](image)

Source: General Practitioner Contractor Database (GPCD), ISD

As these figures are headcounts, they do not reflect differences in part-time hours. The *National Primary Care Workforce Survey 2017* 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, and there is now roughly the same number of male and female doctors aged 50 years and over.

More detailed information on the age and sex profile of the GP workforce is provided in the accompanying spreadsheet **Table 1: Number of GPs in Scotland by age, designation & sex, 2009-2019**.
Figure 2: Number of GPs in Scotland by sex and age group, as at 30 September 2019

Source: General Practitioner Contractor Database (GPCD), ISD

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/Specialist Trainee: A medical practitioner in a GP training program. Note that doctors in the first two years of their training (e.g. those in foundation programmes) are not included in the numbers provided here.

Figure 3 shows the number of GPs by designation between 2009 and 2019. The majority of GPs in 2019 were classed as performers (see the Glossary for definitions). This number has decreased over the last five years, with an 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.
The percentage of specialist trainees has seen a slight increase from 9% in 2009 to 12% in 2019.

Figure 4 compares the total number of GPs in Scotland with the number excluding specialist trainees over the past ten years.
The graph shows a steady headcount of GPs (excluding specialist trainees) of between 4,444 in 2009 and 4,469 in 2019.

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.

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 5 shows the decreasing trend in the number of practices, which along with the overall increase in the general practice population (seen in figure 6 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.

Figure 5: Number of GP practices in Scotland, 2019

![Graph showing the decreasing trend in the number of GP practices between 2009 and 2019.](image)

Source: General Practitioner Contractor Database (GPCD), ISD

Figure 6 shows the relative change in the number of GP patients in each age category between 2009 and 2019. It is clear that there are considerably more patients aged 65+ now than in 2009, 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 (see Epidemiology of multimorbidity and implications for health care, research, and medical education: a cross-sectional study).
There is considerable variation in the number of patients registered at a given general practice across Scotland. Practice list sizes can range from 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 7 shows the spread of practice list size in each NHS Board. Each dot represents a practice.

The average (or mean) practice list size in Scotland for 2019 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.
Figure 7: Practice list size by NHS Board, 2019

Source: Community Health Index (CHI) Database

Detailed information on the number of GP patients in each NHS board and council area, and 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.

Figure 8 shows the trends in practice type over the last 10 years. The majority (84%) of practices in Scotland are run by GPs with a GMS/17J contract in place. Since 2013 there has been a gradual decrease in the number of GMS/17J practices, with a slight increase in 2C practices.

**Figure 8: General Practice contract types, 2009-2019**

![Chart showing trends in practice type from 2009 to 2019](chart.png)

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/Specialist Trainee  A medical practitioner who is being trained in general practice.

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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<td>Number of GPs at Local Authority level by designation and sex</td>
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<td>Practice populations by urban/rural classification</td>
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Further Information

Further Information can be found on the ISD website.
For more information on GPs and GP practices in Scotland see the General Practice section of our website.
The next release of this publication will be 8 December 2020.

Rate this publication

Please provide feedback on this publication to help us improve our services.
Appendices

Appendix 1 – 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, who work only in Out of Hours services, or who are in the early stages of GP training (those in Foundation programmes). 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 all years. Practice population files (CHI population registered at GP practices) are based on snapshots as at 30 September for the years 2009 to 2017, and as at 1 October for 2018 and 2019. Practice list size information is based on snapshots at 1 October for all years. 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.
## Appendix 2 – Publication Metadata

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<td>General Practice – GP workforce and practice list sizes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Headcounts of GPs contracted to work in Scottish general practices in the years 2009 to 2019 and information on practices and their registered patients</td>
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<td>Theme</td>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
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<td>Topic</td>
<td>General Practice</td>
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<td>Format</td>
<td>Excel Workbooks</td>
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<td>Data source(s)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Release date</td>
<td>3 December 2019</td>
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<td>Frequency</td>
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<td>Timeframe of data and timeliness</td>
<td>Data up to 1 October 2019. This is the normal timeliness for this publication and no delays have occurred. Reports data since 2009.</td>
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<td>Continuity of data</td>
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<td>Revisions statement</td>
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<td>Revisions relevant to this publication</td>
<td>The data are taken from a dynamic database, with ongoing updating of records. Each year’s release includes a refresh of the previous years, and as new information comes to light the numbers may change from those previously published.</td>
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<tr>
<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 uses of the statistics</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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<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</td>
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<td>Comprehensiveness</td>
<td>The data are considered complete. Workforce statistics taken from the General Practitioner Contractor Database (GPCD).</td>
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<td>Comparability</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>It is the policy of ISD Scotland to make its web sites and products accessible according to published guidelines.</td>
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<td>Coherence and clarity</td>
<td>Tables and charts are accessible via the ISD website at: <a href="http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/General-Practice/">http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/General-Practice/</a></td>
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Appendix 3 – Early access details

Pre-Release Access

Under terms of the "Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008", ISD is 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

Early Access for Management Information

These statistics will also have been made available to those who needed access to ‘management information’, ie as part of the delivery of health and care:

Early Access for Quality Assurance

These statistics will also have been made available to those who needed access to help quality assure the publication:
Appendix 4 – 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 NHSScotland and the Scottish Government and others, responsive to the needs of NHSScotland 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](#).