

# Number of EU nurses registering to work in the UK drops by 96% post Brexit

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There has been a 96% drop in the number of nurses from the EU registering to work in the UK since July last year. Healthcare Europa has been talking to operators and consultants about what effect this might have.

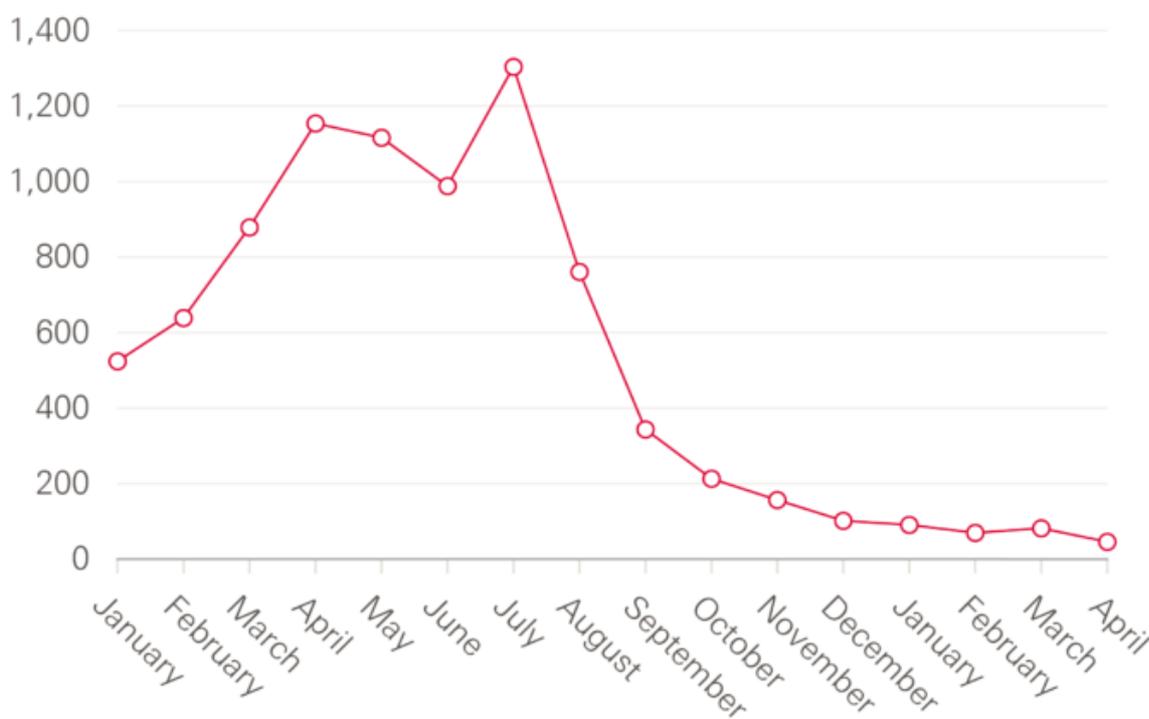
Just 46 registered in April this year. The figures saw a sharp drop off, from a high of 1,304 in July last year, to 344 by September.

The figures were obtained by a Freedom of Information Act application to the Nursing and Midwifery Council by independent UK-based charity The Health Foundation.

Since 2008, the majority of international nurses registering in the UK have come from within the EU. Healthcare Nova hears repeatedly from operators that recruitment and retention of staff – especially nursing staff – is one of their main concerns.

## New nurse registrants from the EU

Total number of EU nurse registrants in the UK, January 2016–April 2017



The Health Foundation  
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Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council.

The figures show a sharp decline following the Brexit referendum which took place on June 23 last year.

Nursing home operator and CEO of the Registered Nursing Home Association Frank Ursell told Healthcare Europa: "I'm concerned. It worries me. I can't believe it's 46."

“I opened my nursing home 34 years ago. And for 33½ years I never used an agency nurse. From October of last year, I wasn’t able to replace staff and I’ve now got an £8,000 a month bill for agency staff I never had before.”

He added that there were issues bringing in international staff because of immigration requirements, explaining: “The problem with the Home Office, and getting international nurses in, is that the salary we have to pay them is quite difficult to achieve. If a nurse is being paid almost a manager rate and you have several of those it becomes an impossible task.”

There were other issues with bringing in international staff, Ursell added. He said: “I was speaking to an operator today who said he was having problems with the English language test. The problem is it’s a grammar driven test, written not spoken. People might speak perfectly good English but not be able to express it in writing.”

His views were echoed by a member of the senior management team at another UK-based nursing home group who asked not to be named. She told us: “The figures are concerning. This will definitely have an effect on our business. And if you look at the figures, 37% of nurses in the UK are due to retire, they are over 50, and with an ageing population and we’ve seen a reduction in the number of students as well and not just in the UK.

“Providers are reducing the number of nursing services they provide because they can’t recruit enough. The complexity of care we are providing now is significantly higher and you need good nurses to deliver safe, high quality care. You need good nurses with good communication skills. But we’d rather not provide a service than one we’re not happy with from a quality point of view.”

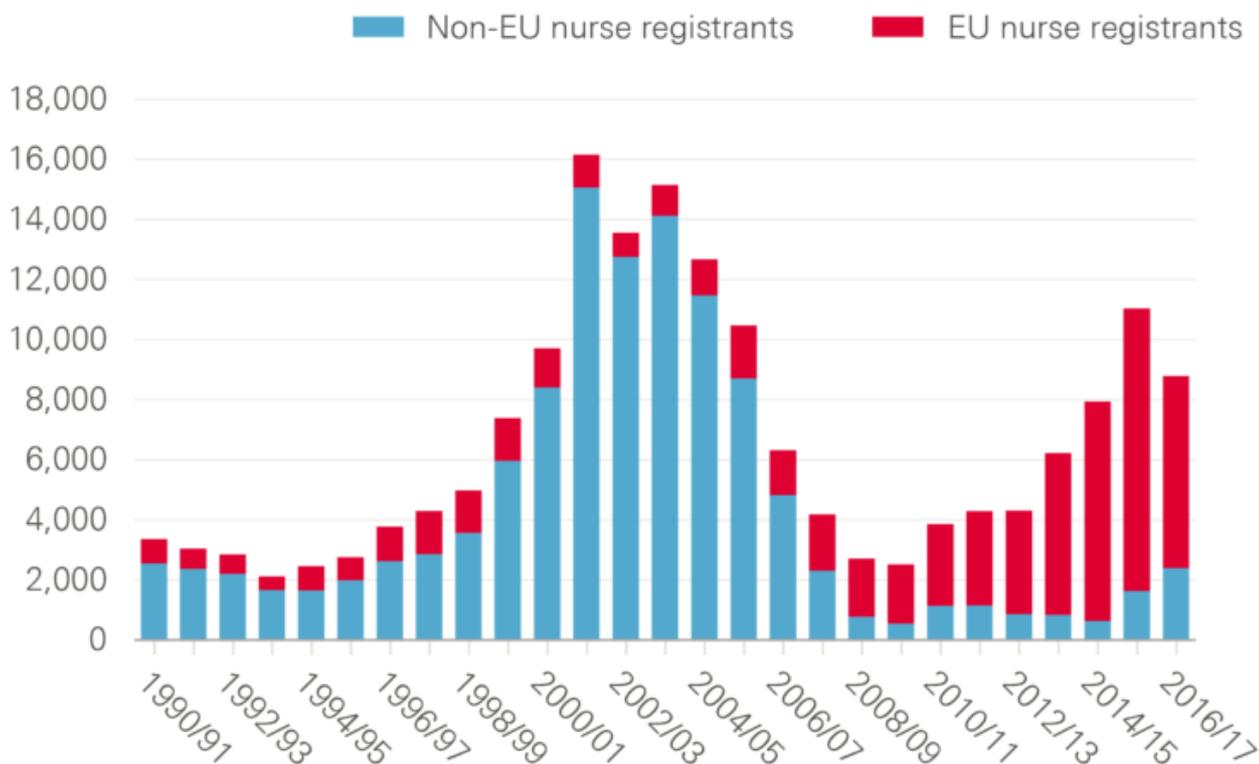
“We’ll need to look at other markets. You need people with very good communication skills who are culturally appropriate.

“Historically we did recruit more from places like the Phillipines, Malaysia and India and there’s some very good nurses there, however with the tightening of immigration rules that’s become more difficult. The EU has been easier but now that’s dropped people will go back to emerging markets as it’s a global market for nurses.

“But with the pressure on immigration figures there’s a role for the government to make it easier for nurses to come and work in the UK as it’s a ‘shortage occupation’.”

# New international nurse registrants

Number of EU and non-EU nurse registrants in the UK, 1990/91–2016/17



The Health Foundation  
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Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council.

*Since 2008, the majority of new non-domestic nurse registrants has come from the EU.*

Dr Michelle Tempest, partner at Candestic, a bespoke health and social care management consultancy, said that while Brexit might be “the straw that broke the camel’s back”, the problem of staffing was a storm that had been brewing for many years.

She explained: “I see it as a perfect storm. Staffing is healthcare’s number one concern. Brexit or no Brexit, Bremain or no Bremain, this coalition government or none – they have been staring down this barrel of a gun for quite some time. We should have been ahead of this. The new figures about the EU are a tipping point.

“This was an inevitability and although we’ve been trying to take on nurses from other countries – India, Pakistan, the Philippines, it’s getting more and more difficult to do.

“The effect will be spread right across the whole sector, whether or not you’re in nursing homes, hospitals, a community provider, a GP surgery, home care or care homes.”

One answer, she says, is to make the job more attractive. She explained: “Both the private and the public sector will need to look at this. You got to make it more attractive for nurses. You’ve got to give them a career path, invest in them, with training, respect them and think about more flexible working. Help with housing would be a sweetener to helping people to come in.”

Candestic colleague Dr Joe Taylor said he believes the nursing shortage may lead the NHS to move towards incentivising its nurses more like the private sector does. He explained: “[It will] have to take on board training responsibilities, the exposure you are going to give your staff to new clinical situations, and the responsibility of

ensuring that people's careers develop positively and their wages are appropriately matched to their ability. More like the private providers.