

State of Maternity Services Report 2016



Promoting • Supporting • Influencing

#soms2016

Executive summary

“More students need to be trained and brought into the health service as a matter of urgency.”

This is our fifth *State of Maternity Services Report*. One of the benefits of publishing a regular look at the number of babies born, midwives employed, students trained, and so on, is that it affords us some space to spot emerging issues and trends. But it also helps us spot the issues that do not go away, year after year.

One such issue is the ageing of the profession. Take England as an example. The number of midwives working in the NHS in England has risen by around 1,500 since 2010. That is good news. But if we look at the age profile of these midwives, we see that the number aged under 50 actually fell. Indeed, one in three midwives in England (33%) are now in their fifties or sixties.

The picture in Scotland is complicated by the fact that midwives and maternity care assistants are put together in the age profile numbers, but two in every five (41%) in this combined group are now aged 50 or older. And, as in England, the number below the age of 50 fell. In Wales, one in three midwives (35%) are now in their fifties or sixties. And in Northern Ireland it is two in every five (40%).

Older midwives can bring great experience to their roles, of course, and are great assets to the NHS. But it is a concern if such a large proportion of the midwifery workforce is so close to retirement. More students need to be trained and brought into the health service as a matter of urgency if we are to turn this situation around. If we wait, there will not be enough time for us to train new midwives and get them into the service so they can gain the experience and confidence they need before their more senior, more experienced colleagues retire.

Another long-term trend is the ageing of the profile of mothers. Across the UK, there are fewer births to younger women, more to older women. In every region of England since 2010, for instance, we are seeing more babies born to women in their thirties or older, and fewer to women under 30. Since 2001, in England, we have seen an increase of over 12,000 in the number of births per year to women aged 40 or older.

“Another long-term trend is the ageing of the profile of mothers. Across the UK, there are fewer births to younger women, more to older women.”

The age group to see the biggest rise in births in Scotland has been women in their late thirties, with 2,000 more births per year compared to the year 2000. In Wales, births per year to women aged 40 or older has now passed the 1,000 mark. In Northern Ireland, births to women in their thirties are up by almost 3,000 since the start of the century.

Taken as a whole, women who give birth later in life will need more care from the NHS. That will not be the case for every woman in that category, but it will be true on average. They are perfectly entitled to that care, of course, but the added complexity and cost means that more needs to be invested in maternity care to ensure they get the quality of care they want, need and deserve.

Rates of obesity also contribute to the demands on the service. In England and Scotland over one in five pregnant women (21% and 22% respectively) are obese.

All of these factors put extra pressure on maternity services. More midwives continue to be needed, and in England – where births are on the up once again – we calculate the shortage to be the equivalent of around 3,500 full-time midwives.

Despite this big shortage, in the 12 months to September 2016 the NHS midwifery workforce in England rose by just 104. At this rate, the midwifery workforce of an average maternity unit is growing at the pitiful rate of around one extra midwife every two years.

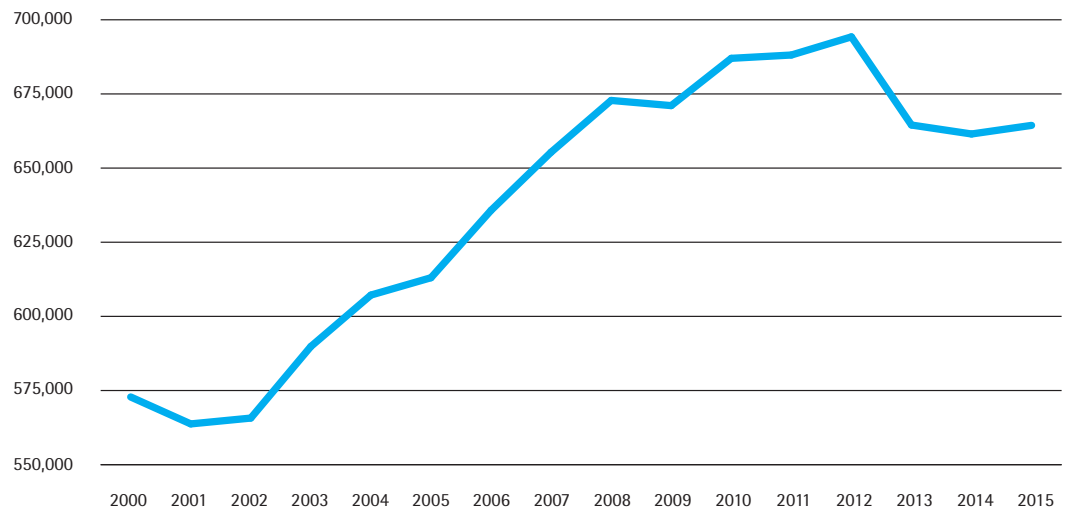
When England is commissioning training places for around 2,500 student midwives each year, it is a problem if the workforce is increasing by only around 100. In other words, for every 25 people entering their midwifery training in England, the net result is a workforce that grows by just one midwife.

This is because the boost the workforce gets each year when newly-qualified midwives emerge from training is whittled down during the rest of the year by midwives retiring, or leaving for other reasons such as the lack of flexible working for those juggling family commitments. To reduce this we need both to promote retention of existing staff, especially for those who need more flexible working arrangements, and to ensure more new midwives are employed quickly post-qualification to improve the age profile.

The midwifery profession is ageing fast, just as the demands on it are growing. We are standing on a cliff edge and need swift action now.

England

Live births



Number of live births

Source: the Office for National Statistics

12%

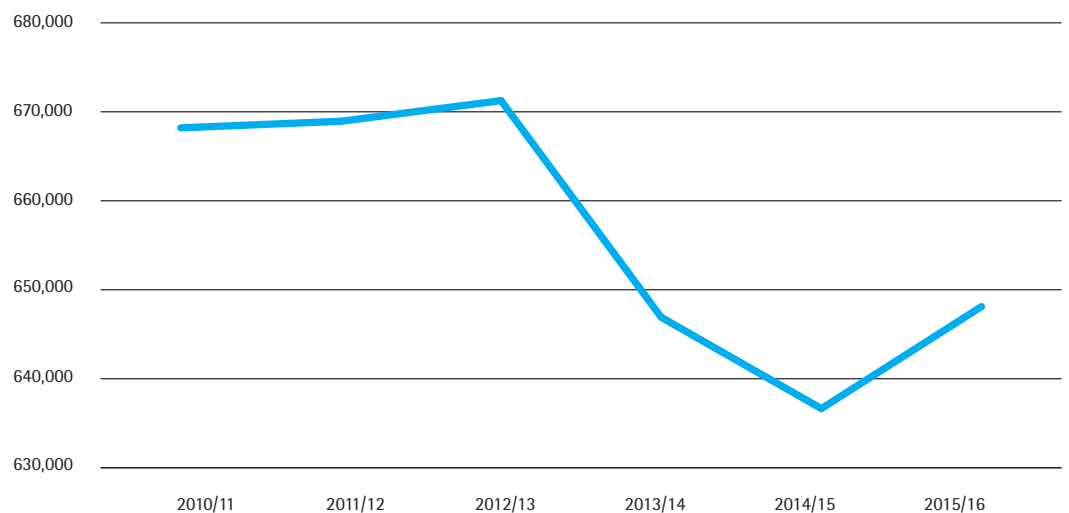
of pregnant women in England attending antenatal booking appointments with a recorded smoking status in August 2016 were smokers

Source: NHS Digital

Number of hospital births

Source: NHS Digital

Hospital births



The number of babies born in England in 2015 was up around 3,000 on the year before. Overall, the number of babies born in England in 2015 was over 50,000 higher than 10 years earlier, and over 100,000 higher than 2001.

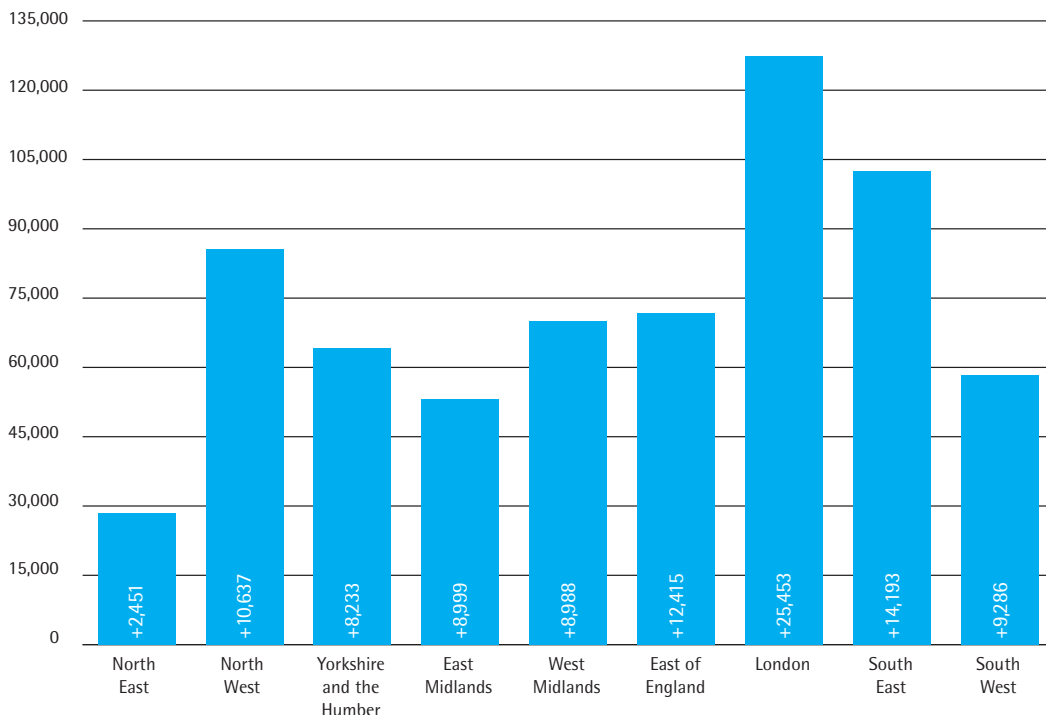
Slightly more recent figures are available just for hospital births, which make up almost all births in England. These show that in the year to 31 March

2016, there were 11,500 more babies born in hospital compared to the preceding 12 months. That was an average of almost an extra 1,000 births per month.

There was a two-year period (2012-2014) during which the number of births in England fell, from a 40-year high, but that trend has now reversed. The pressure on an already stretched maternity service is on the rise again.

England

Births by region



Every region has seen births increase by thousands since 2001. The regions that have seen the biggest rises are London (25,453 more babies born in 2015

compared to 2001), the South East (14,193 more babies born), eastern England (12,415 more babies) and the North West (10,637 more).



Number of live births, 2015

Change since 2001 shown in each column

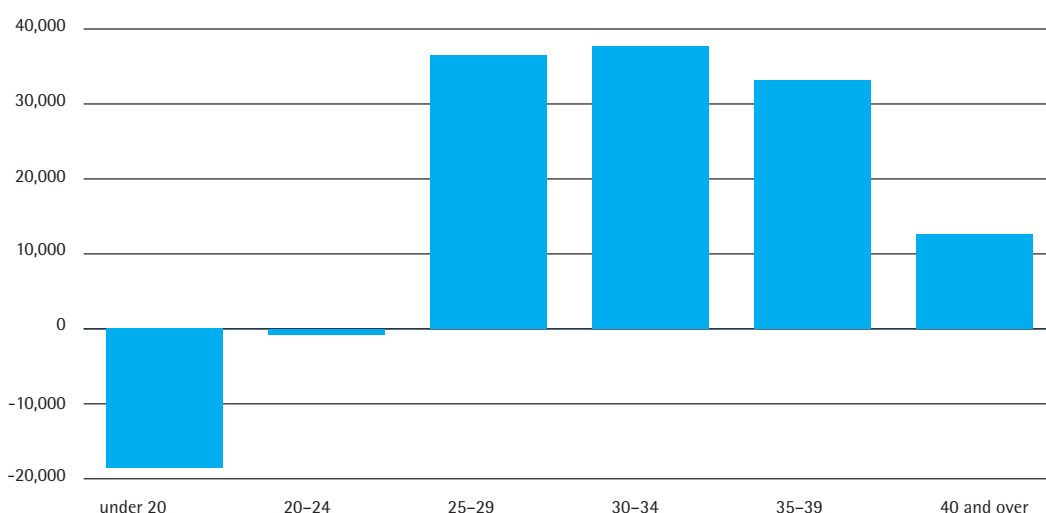
Source: the Office for National Statistics

21%

of pregnant women in England whose height and weight were recorded at the booking appointment in August 2016 were obese

Source: NHS Digital

Age profile of mothers



There have been big changes to the age profile of mothers since 2001. Births to those aged under 20 are well down. For women in their early twenties the number is broadly unchanged. But to women in older age brackets, births are way up. Over 36,000 more babies born to women in their late twenties. Over 70,000 more births to women in their thirties. And for women aged 40 or older, there were over 12,000 more births.

Older women will, on average, require more care during their pregnancy and at the birth. This will not be true for all older women, but overall it does add to the mix of complexity with which maternity services must cope. An ageing of the profile of women accessing maternity care does therefore increase the number of midwives needed by the NHS.

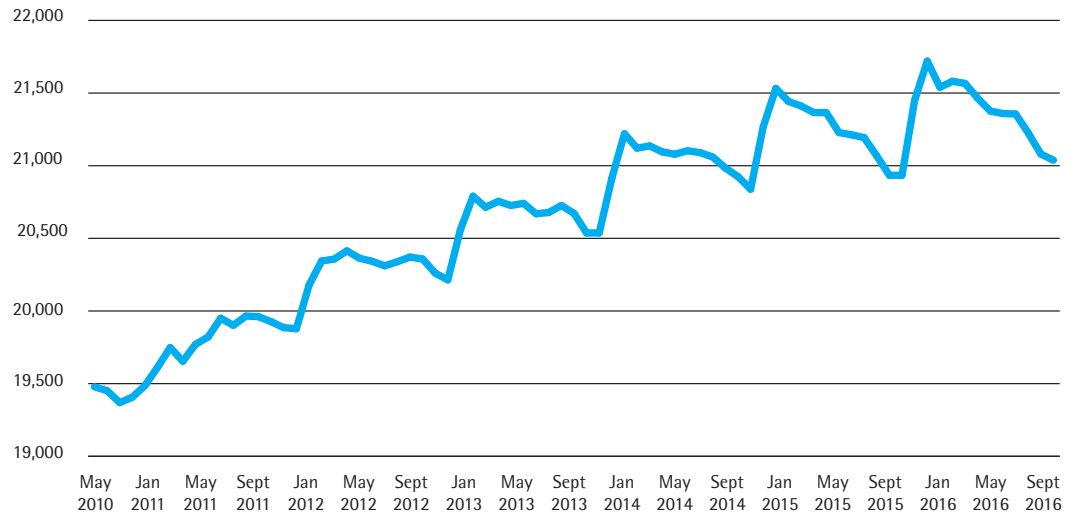
Change in number of live births, 2001-2015

Source: the Office for National Statistics



England

Midwives: monthly figures



Number of full time equivalent (FTE) midwives

Source: NHS Digital

Between May 2010 and September 2016, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) midwives working in the NHS in England rose by 1,560.

But the rate of increase has slowed massively over that time. In the 12 months between August 2014 and August 2015, for example, the number of FTE midwives in the NHS in England rose by just nine, nationwide. That equates to an extra 0.036 of one midwife per maternity unit.

The growth in the size of the midwifery workforce has clearly stalled, with the number of midwives fluctuating around the 21,000 mark throughout the last three years.

There are colossal pressures weighing down on midwives. The number of births is on the up again, and is well up on what it was at the start of the century.

The women accessing maternity care are getting older. But the number of midwives is standing still.

Progress was made at the start of this decade. We saw helpful rises in the number of midwives in those years. That seems to have come to an end however, just as pressures are mounting. We need to see decisive action to increase the number of midwives in the NHS in England.

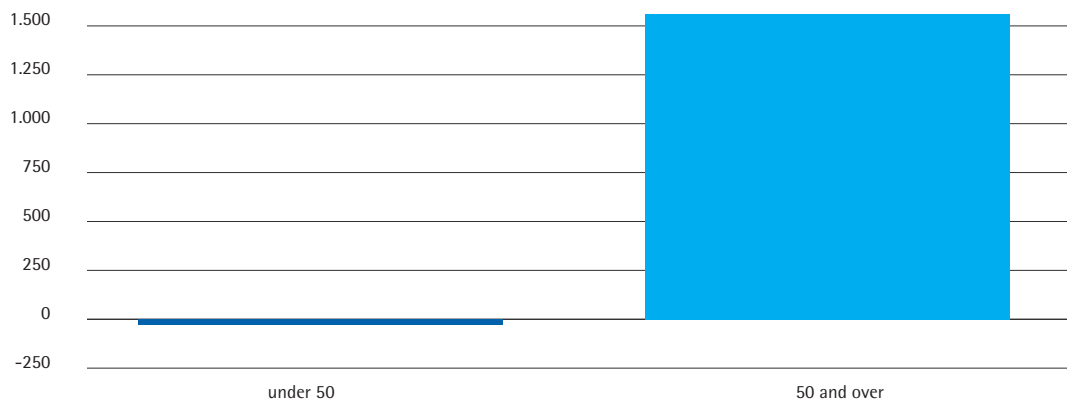
Our current calculation is that the NHS in England is short of the equivalent of around 3,500 full-time midwives. We are however currently looking at the impact of growing complexity on the typical midwife's workload. This may result in the RCM changing the calculation we use, and potentially a higher shortage figure.

0.4

The average number of midwives per NHS maternity unit in England was up just 0.4 in the 12 months to September 2016

Source: NHS Digital

Age profile of midwives



Change in number of NHS midwives, September 2010–July 2016

Source: NHS Digital (figures are headcount)

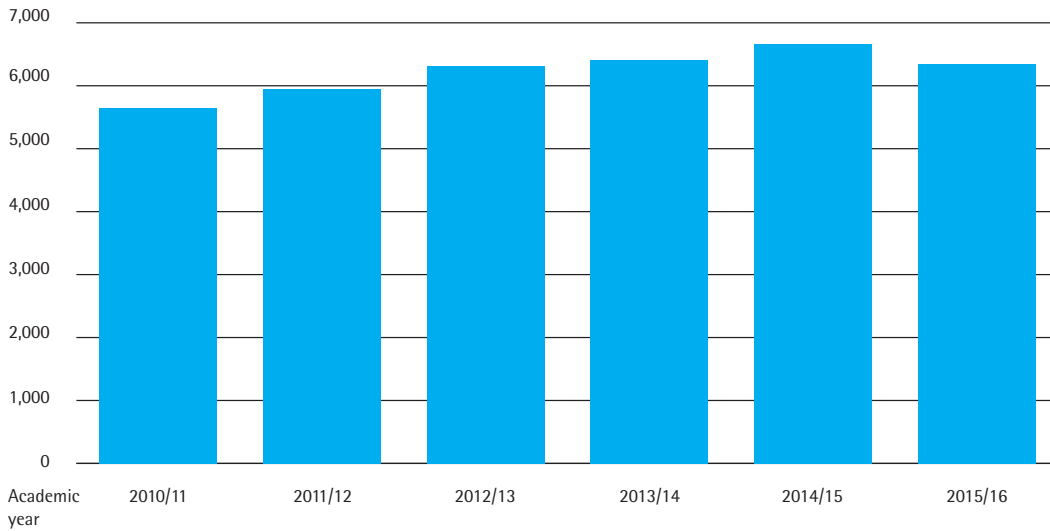
Midwifery is an ageing profession. Since 2010, the number of midwives aged under 50 has fallen, whilst the number in their fifties or sixties has risen. In July 2016, one third (32.5%) were in this older age bracket.

In terms of specific numbers, between September 2010 and July 2016 the total number of NHS midwives in England aged under 50 fell by 27. The number aged 50 or above rose by 1,560.

This situation makes the need for more new midwives even more urgent. We will need to replace these older, typically more experienced midwives with new midwives in good time, so that their replacements are able to build up their level of experience before their older colleagues leave the profession.

England

All student midwives



Student midwives at any stage in their training

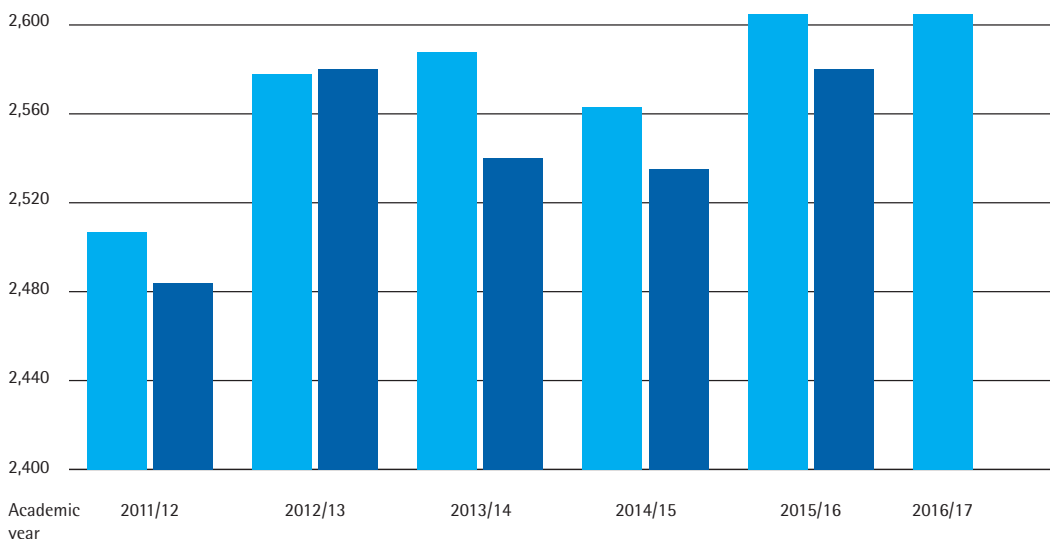
Source: ministerial answers to parliamentary questions

1,355

NHS midwives in England in September 2016 were nationals of other EU countries

Source: NHS Digital

New student midwives



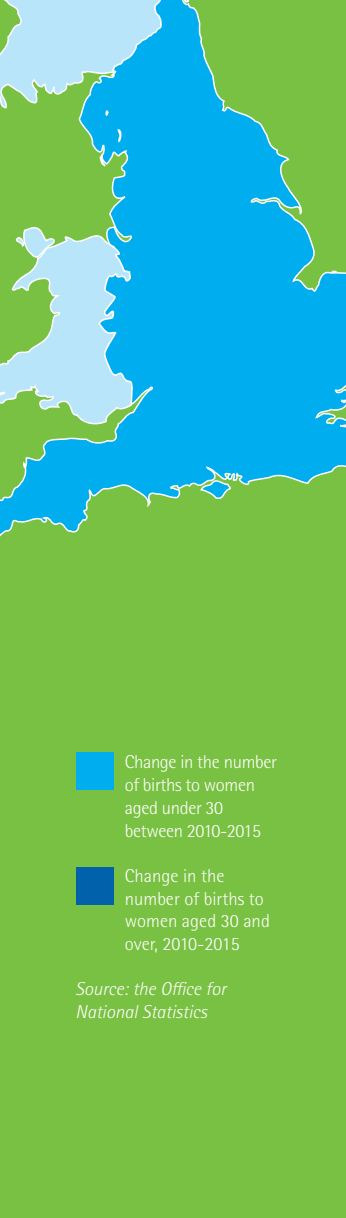
Student midwife places commissioned

Actual student midwife places

Source: ministerial answers to parliamentary questions

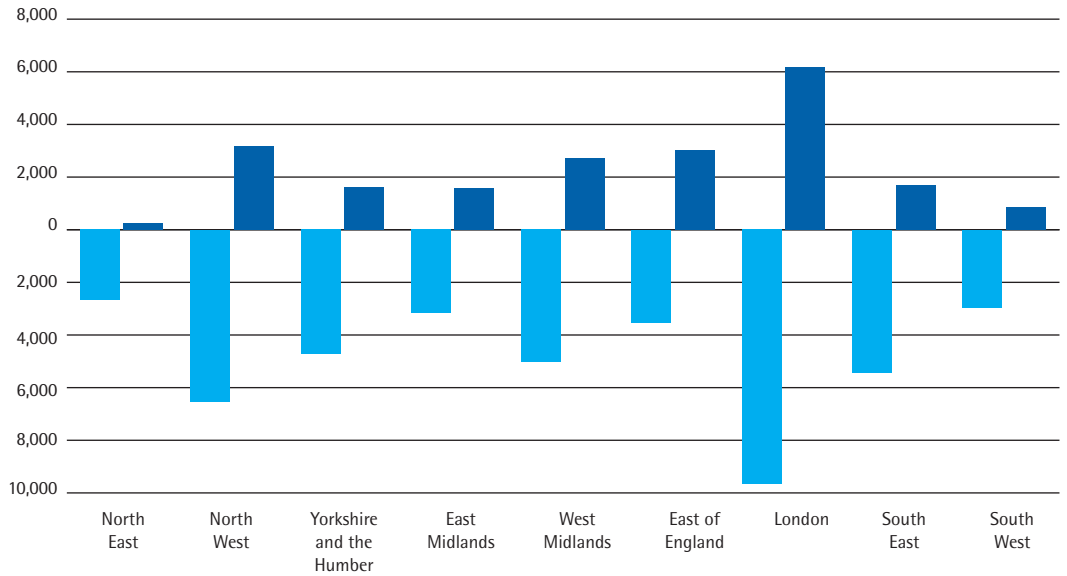
It is positive that the number of places for midwifery students has been maintained in recent years. This resulted in a rise of 1,000 in the total number of students at some point in their training in the four years between 2010/11 and 2014/15. We are slightly concerned however about the drop of 300 in the number between 2014/15 and 2015/16.

From autumn 2017, midwifery students in England will no longer receive any bursary and will face full tuition fees. These changes will result in newly-qualified midwives being tens of thousands of pounds in debt as they start their working lives as NHS midwives. The effect of these big changes are currently unknown.



England

Age profile of mothers by region



Change in the number of births to women aged under 30 between 2010-2015

Change in the number of births to women aged 30 and over, 2010-2015

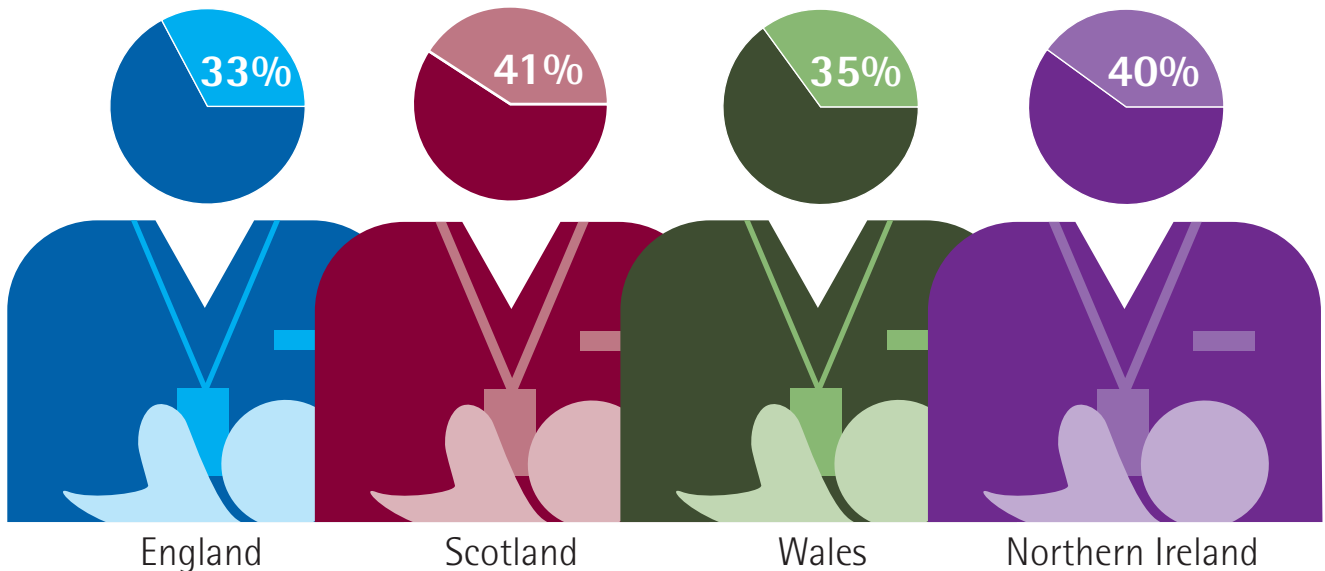
Source: the Office for National Statistics

In every region of England, births to women under the age of 30 fell between 2010 and 2015, and births to older women rose.

Midwifery – an ageing workforce

Over one third of midwives are now aged **50+**

Large sections of the midwifery workforce in each part of the UK is fast approaching retirement age. We need to train and employ enough midwives before that happens if we are to avoid a crisis within the next few years. We need action now, before it is too late to do anything in time.



Scotland

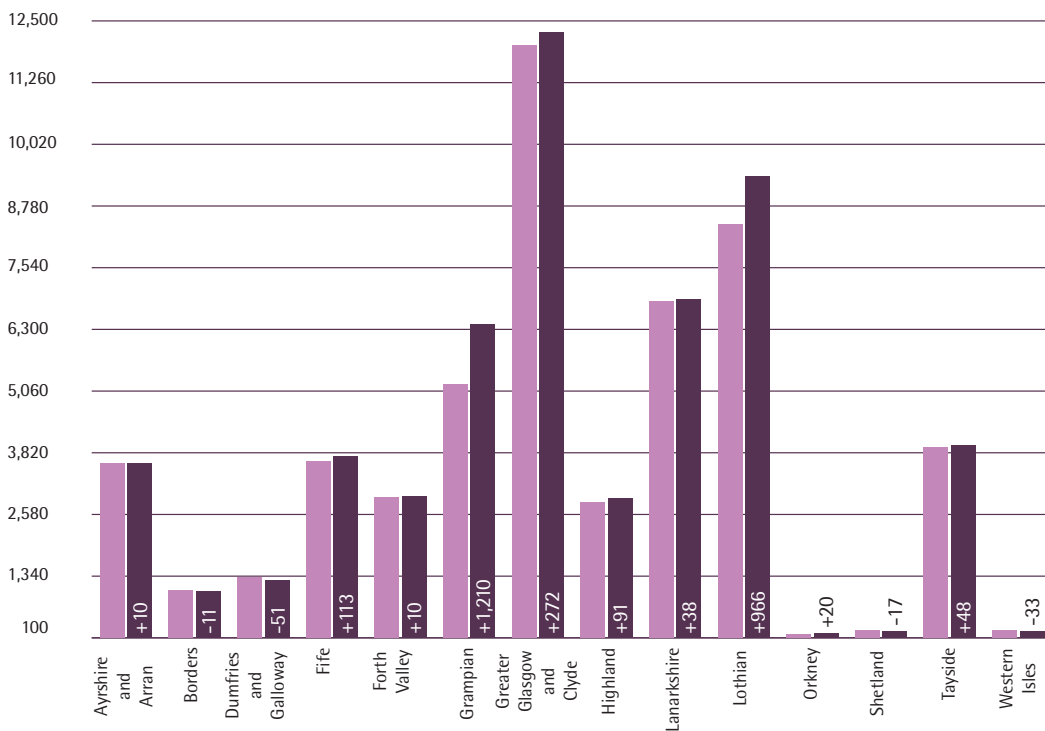
Live births



The number of births in Scotland in 2016 was around the level of a decade earlier, up on the level at the start of the century. It is down about 5,500 however

on the recent peak of 2008, when the number of births in Scotland topped 60,000.

Live births by NHS board area



The local birth figures, for the period 2003-2015, are mixed. In Grampian, for example, there was a 23% jump in the number of babies born during this period – up 1,210 births per year. A rise of almost 1,000 births was also recorded in Lothian, a jump of over 11%

Whilst some areas did see falls in the number of births, these falls were small. The largest fall was in Dumfries and Galloway, which saw a dip of 51 births (or less than 4%).



Number of live births

Source: National Records of Scotland

Number of live births, 2003

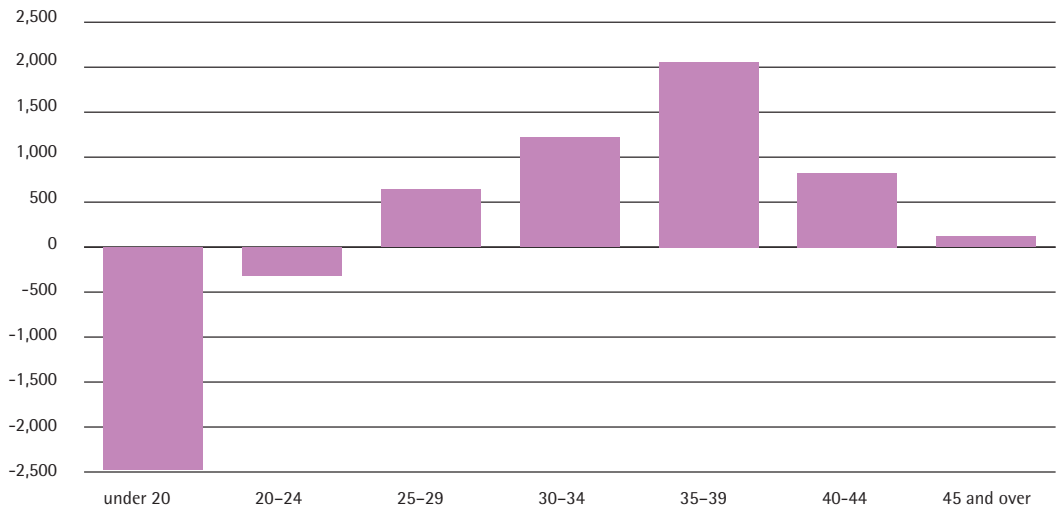
Number of live births, 2015

Source: National Records of Scotland



Scotland

Age profile of mothers



Change in number of live births, 2000-2015

Source: National Records of Scotland

The profile of women using NHS maternity care in Scotland is ageing. The number of births to those aged under 20 fell by almost 2,500 (over half) between 2000 and 2015. Births to women in their early twenties also fell.

Rises were recorded for every age group from the late twenties and above, with the biggest rise seen in

women in their late thirties (up over 2,000). A rise of around a further 1,000 was seen amongst women aged 40 and over.

The number of women giving birth aged 30 or over in 2015/16 was more than double the number 40 years earlier, in 1975/76.

22%

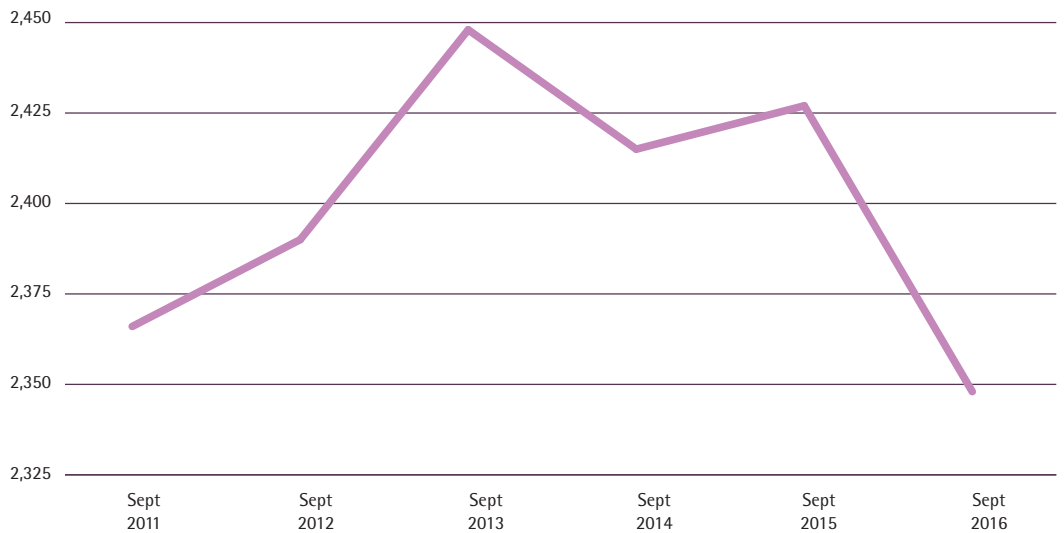
of women were obese at the time of their booking appointment in 2015/16

Source: ISD Scotland

Number of FTE midwives

Source: ISD Scotland

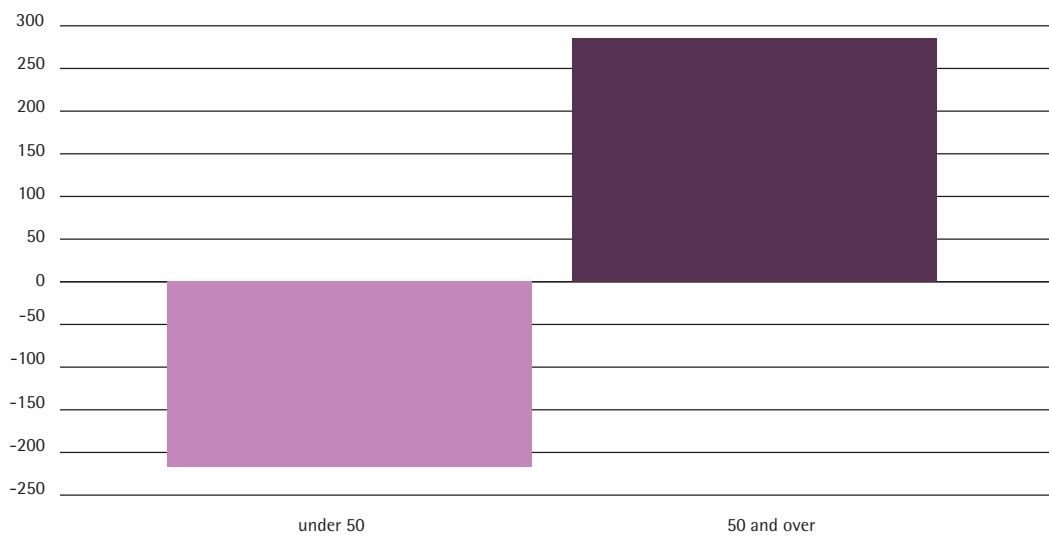
Midwives



The number of midwives working in the NHS in Scotland has been fairly stable – a little either side of 2,400 – for a few years now.

Scotland

Age profile of midwives and MCAs



The number of midwives and maternity care assistants in Scotland aged under 50 fell by 217 between 2011 and 2016. Over the same period, the number aged 50 or older rose, by 285. Staff aged 50 and over now constitute 41% of the workforce.

Vigilance needs to be maintained on the age profile of the profession, so that we ensure the NHS does not

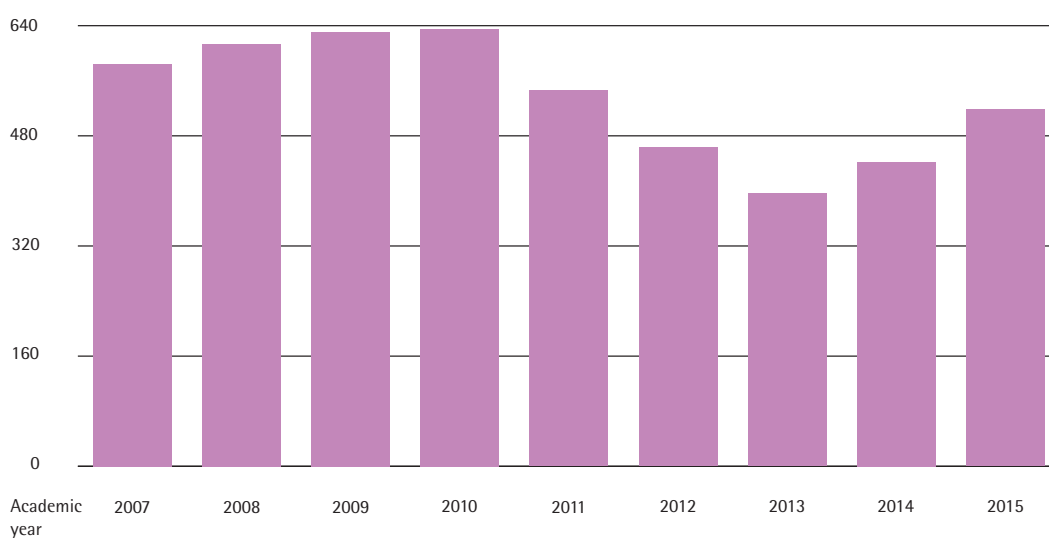
face problems in the coming years as midwives and MCAs leave the workforce through retirement. Failure to get to grips with this problem could wipe out the success Scotland has had in recent years, especially when compared to England, in maintaining an appropriately sized midwifery workforce.



Change in number of NHS midwives and MCAs, 2011–2016

Source: ISD Scotland

Student midwives



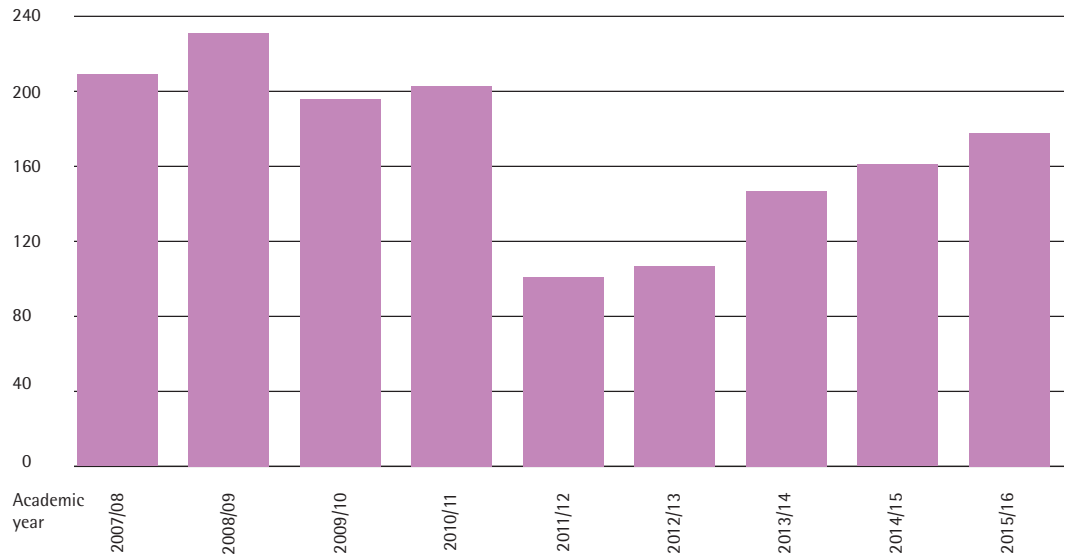
Student midwives at any stage in their training

Source: NHS Education for Scotland



Scotland

New student midwives



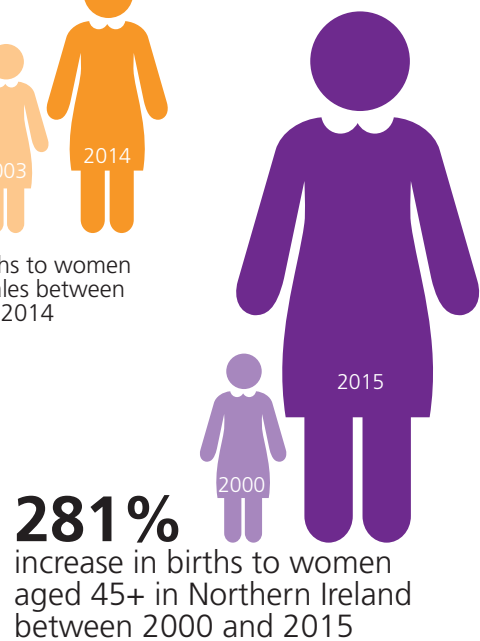
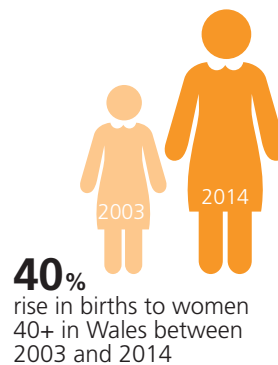
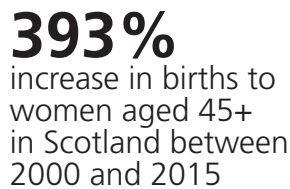
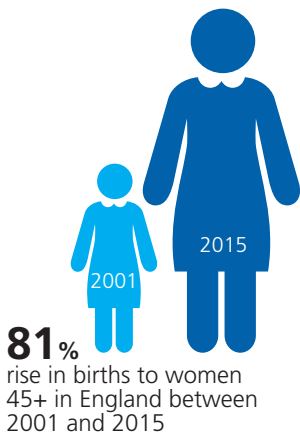
Student midwife places commissioned

Source: NHS Education for Scotland

Midwifery training numbers in Scotland have tended to fluctuate in recent years. The number of places for new student midwives, for example, halved between 2010/11 and 2011/12, from 203 to 101. The number has since recovered to stand at 178 in 2015/16, its highest level for five years.

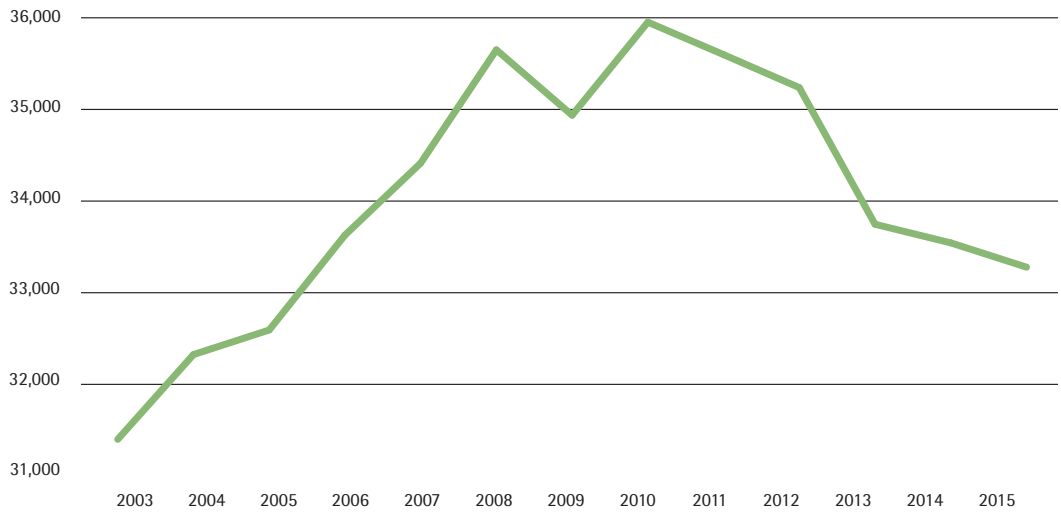
There has also been a recovery in the total number of midwifery students in training. This number stood at 396 in 2013, rising almost a third to 518 in 2015. These increases in training numbers are very welcome, and may help to tackle the age profile problem in the coming years.

The long baby boom for the over 40s



Wales

Live births

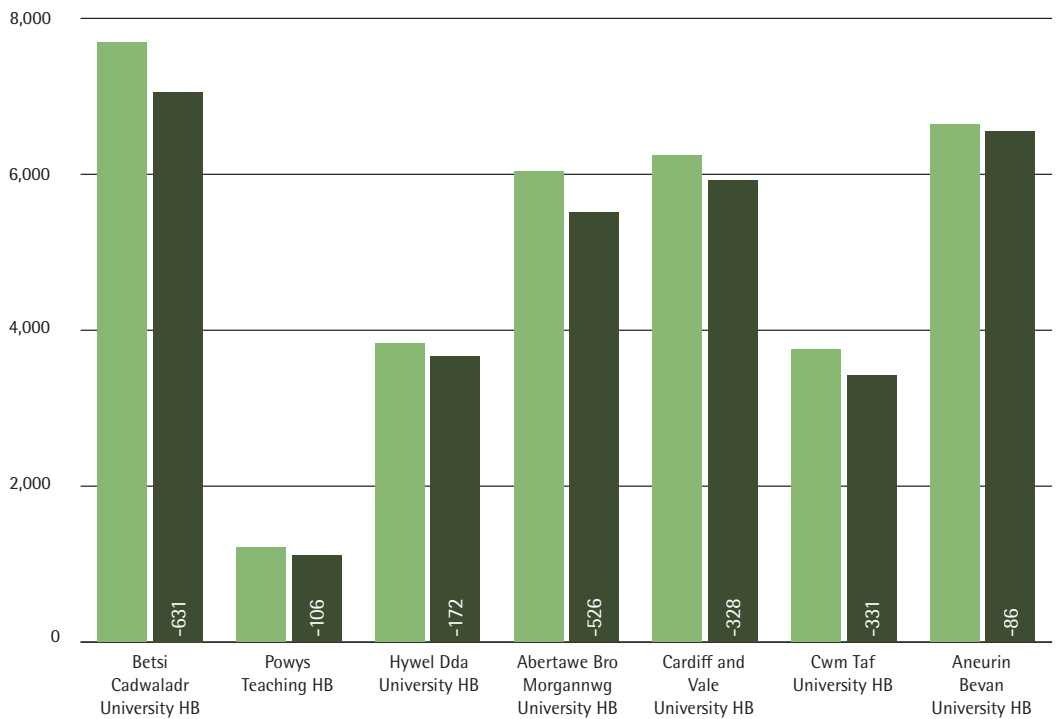


Number of live births

Source: StatsWales

After rising by over 14% between 2003 and 2010, the number of births in Wales has now settled at around 33,000. It has been at that level for the last few years, reaching 33,279 in 2015. This remains 6% higher than was the case in 2003.

Live births by local health board



Number of live births, 2011

Number of live births, 2015

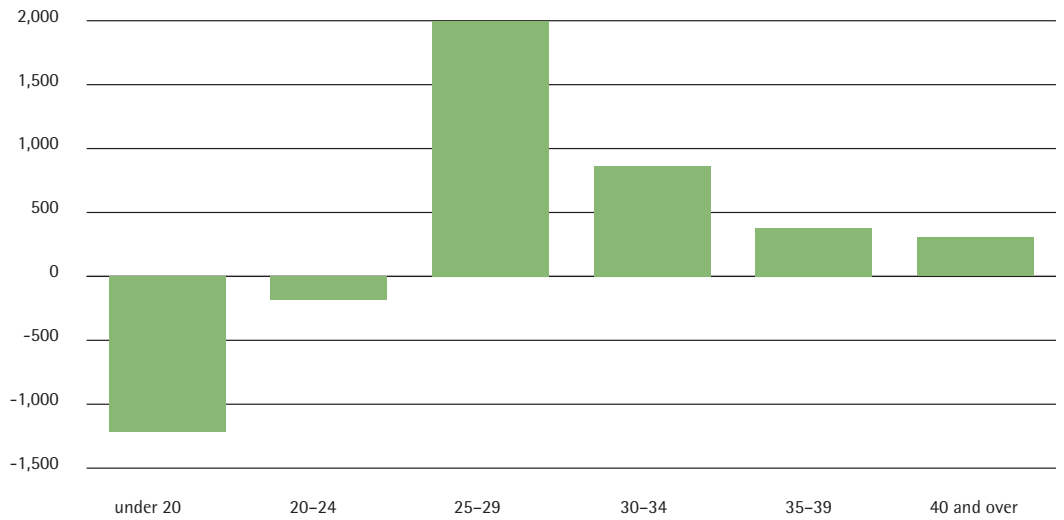
Source: StatsWales

Most areas saw a fall in the number of births between 2011 and 2015 of between eight and nine per cent. Smaller falls were seen by Cardiff and Vale University

Health Board (down 5%), Hywel Dda University Health Board (down 4%), and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (down just 1%).

Wales

Age profile of mothers



Change in number of live births, 2003-2014

Source: StatsWales

We are seeing many fewer births to women in Wales in their early twenties and younger, with the number falling by 1,400 between 2003 and 2014. Births to women in older age groups all rose. There were 2,000 more births to women in their late twenties, almost 900 more to women in their early thirties. Increasing by over 300, births to women aged 40 and over surpassed the 1,000-mark for the first time.

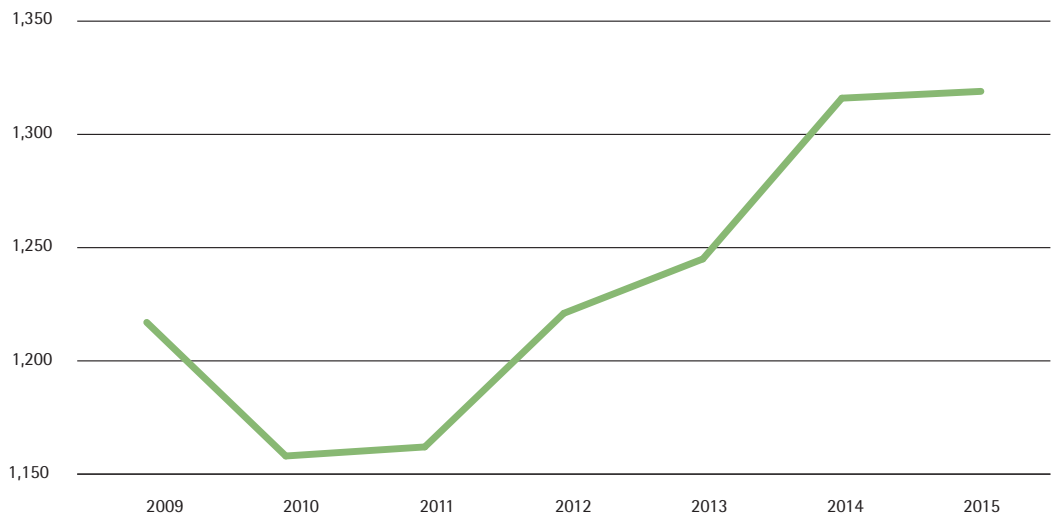
Overall, women who give birth later in life will need more midwifery time and support as there is a higher likelihood of complexity. Inevitably therefore with women giving birth later in life, this does result in a need for more midwives even if the number of births is standing still.

35%

of midwives in Wales in March 2016 were aged 50 and over

Source: ministerial answer to a question in the Welsh Assembly

Midwives



Number of FTE midwives

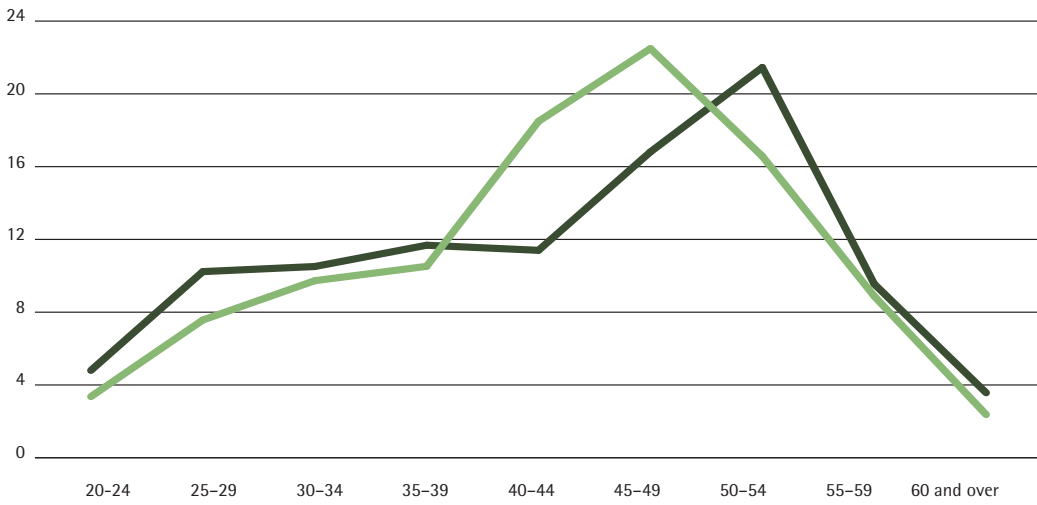
Source: StatsWales

The number of midwives in the NHS in Wales has risen by over 100 in recent years, and that is welcome. It is clear from workforce analyses that have been conducted by health boards however that more are

needed. We welcome the progress made by the Welsh Government, and urge them to continue to train enough midwifery students for current and future needs.

Wales

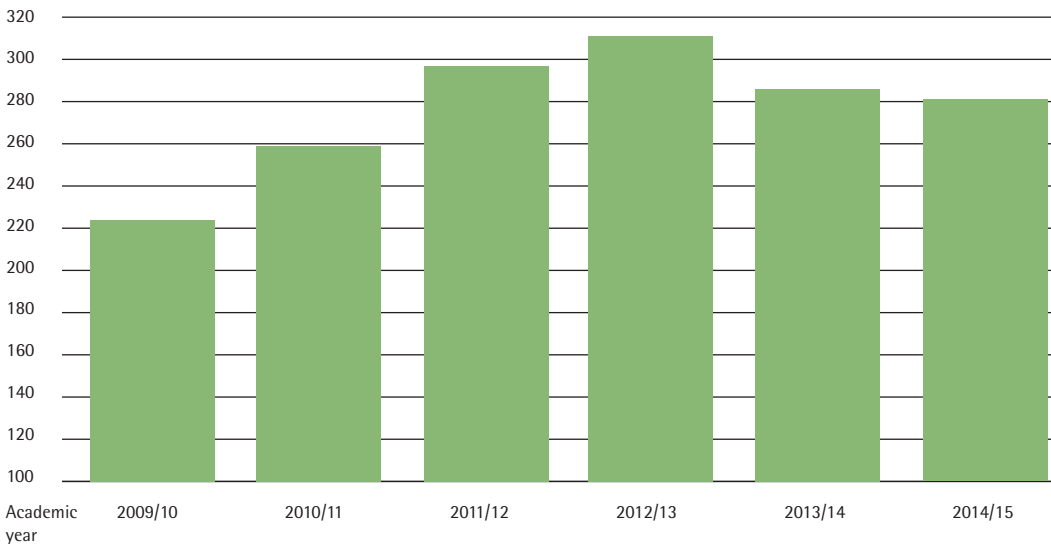
Age profile of midwives



As is the case throughout the UK, the midwifery profession is older now than it was in the past. This underlines the need to maintain, or ideally increase, the number of training places for student

midwives in Wales. That is the only approach, long term, that will reverse the ageing profile of the profession, which ultimately needs to happen.

All student midwives



Wales has maintained a steady number of training places for students but that is no longer appropriate and we urge the Welsh Government to increase the numbers as a priority.



■ % of total midwifery workforce, 2011
 ■ % of total midwifery workforce, 2016

Source: ministerial answer to an Assembly question

70

Of the 94 student midwives who started their training in 2012, 70 were working as midwives in the NHS in Wales in 2015

■ Student midwives at any stage in their training

Source: Health Statistics Wales



Northern Ireland

Live births



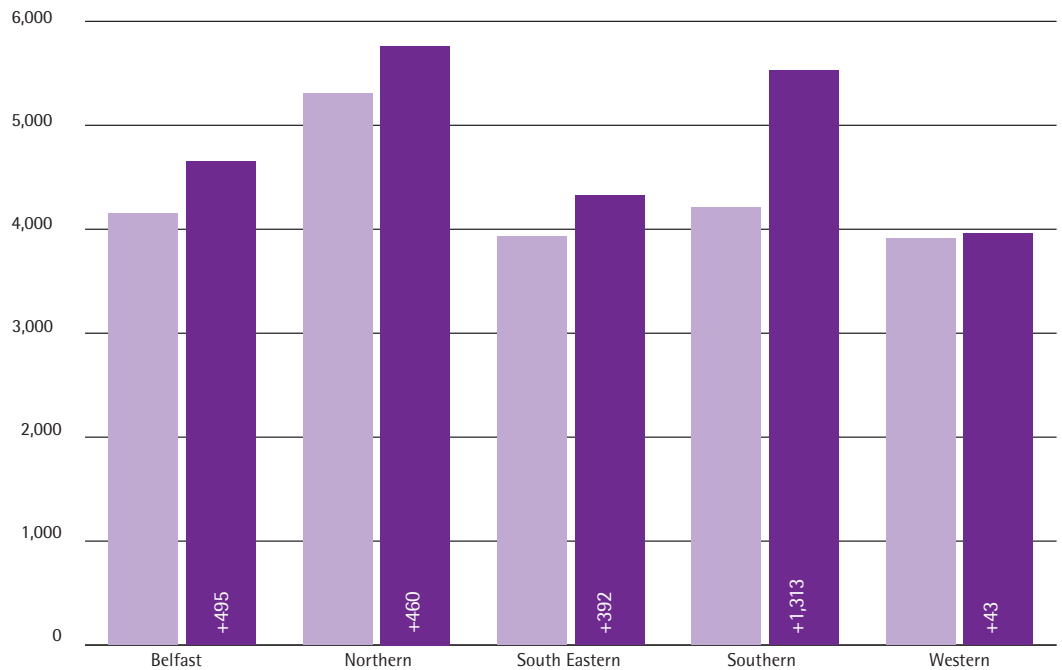
Number of live births

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Note: Births relate only to those women who are resident in Northern Ireland. Due to its land border with Ireland, a significant number of non-residents give birth in Northern Ireland, increasing the pressure on maternity services.

Whilst the number of births in Northern Ireland was 13% higher in 2015 than it was in 2000, overall it has been fairly flat for the last few years. It has settled down at a level a few thousand up on what it was at the turn of the century.

Live births by Health and Social Care Trust area



Number of live births, 2000

Number of live births, 2015

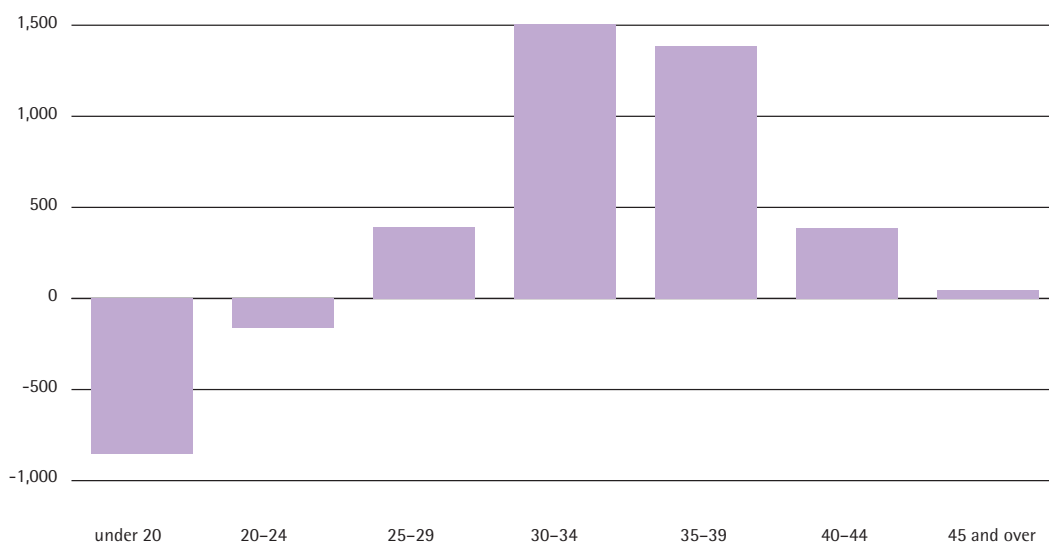
Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Births have risen across Northern Ireland since the year 2000. The smallest rise (up by less than 50) was in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area,

but the biggest was in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area (up over 1,300, the equivalent of almost a third).

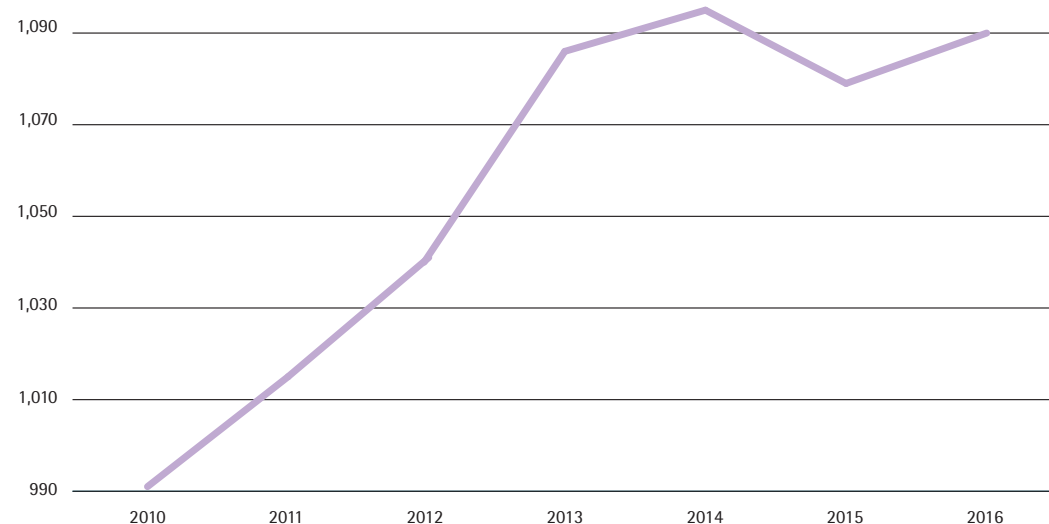
Northern Ireland

Age profile of mothers



Births have fallen by more than 1,000 to those aged under 25, and risen for every older age group. Births were up almost 3,000 for women in their thirties, and up almost 450 for women aged 40 and over.

Midwives



The number of midwives in Northern Ireland has been broadly flat in recent years. Uniquely, Northern Ireland puts midwives and student midwives together in a single figure. This makes it difficult to show either the number of midwives or students.

Particularly in light of the age profile of the profession, we are concerned by midwife numbers in Northern Ireland. There is a very real need to train and employ more midwives, especially before many of the existing workforce reach retirement age. This is a problem that must be tackled, and soon.



Change in number of live births, 2000-2015

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Number of FTE midwives

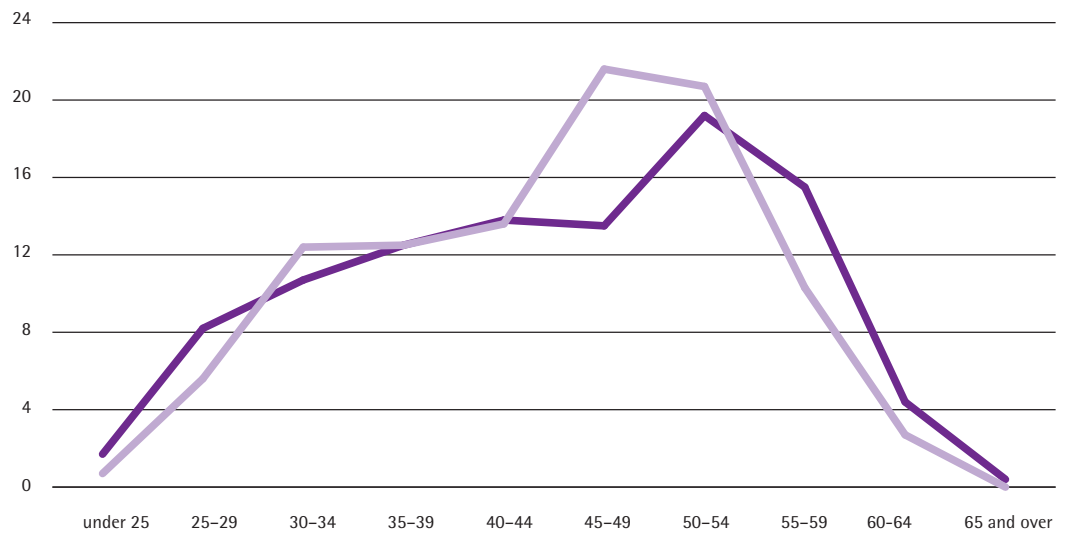
Source: NI Department of Health

Note: from 2013, these numbers include both midwives and student midwives.



Northern Ireland

Age profile of midwives



■ % of total midwifery workforce, 2010
■ % of total midwifery workforce, 2016

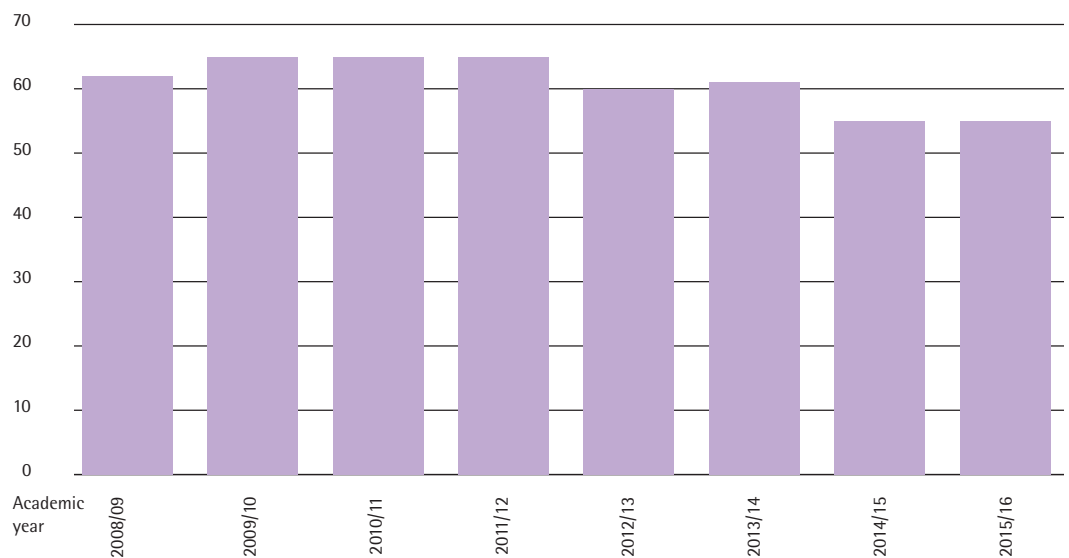
Source: NI Department of Health

It is worrying that the age bands that form the largest components of the midwifery workforce are 50 to 54 and 55 to 59. Together they constitute over a third of the workforce, with those in their sixties making up a further 5%. Those aged 55 or older, who the ones

closest to retirement, make up one in five midwives in Northern Ireland.

This is a challenge that we can see approaching. More work needs to be done to tackle it before it becomes even more urgent.

New student midwives



The number of places for student midwives in Northern Ireland has been very stable in recent years. Given the age profile of midwives locally however there is a clear need to ensure that a large number of newly-qualified midwives are entering the profession in the near future.



The Royal College of Midwives
Headquarters
15 Mansfield Street
London W1G 9NH
020 7312 3535
info@rcm.org.uk
www.rcm.org.uk

Report compiled by Stuart Bonar