



GP VACANCY SURVEY

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GP Vacancy Survey Methods

The following questions were posed to Primary Care Trusts¹ (PCTs) and their equivalent throughout the whole of the UK:

How many GPs work in your Primary Care Organisation (PCO) ?
 How many vacancies do you currently have for GPs ?
 How long has each vacancy existed:
 a) less than three months ?
 b) three months to six months ?
 c) six months to a year ?
 d) twelve months or more ?

Are the vacancies for GMS or PMS posts ?

Response rate

| Country | Number of PCOs contacted | Number of respondents | Sample Response rate |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| England | 150 | 89 | 59% |
| Scotland | 13 | 10 | 77% |
| Wales | 22 | 6 | 27% |
| Northern Ireland | 4 | 4 | 100% |
| Total | 189 | 109 | 58% (average) |

Findings

| Country | Number of GP positions ² in sample | Number of GP vacancies in sample | Of which: vacant 3 months or more | % Vacancies of 3 months or more |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| England | 9,228 | 412 | 314 | 3.40 |
| Scotland ³ | 2,251 | 38 | 25 | 1.11 |
| Wales | 393 | 15 | 11 | 2.80 |
| Northern Ireland | 1,076 | 2 | 1 | 0.10 |

The vacancy rate reflects the number of advertised positions and not the number of doctors needed to provide an optimal service to the local communities.

The survey took place during October and November 2002.

The current situation may change considerably over the next few months. Colchester PCT, for example, advised that in the next few months many GPs will be retiring, creating a high GP vacancy rate.

The analyses are based upon the data supplied by PCTs and their equivalents throughout the UK.

¹ Primary Care Trusts exist in both England and Scotland, although with different structures and functions. The Welsh equivalent is a Local Health Group now shadow Local Health Boards. At the time of the survey, the health structure within Northern Ireland was undergoing reform. As a result, the Health and Social Services Boards were contacted as an alternative.

² Presented in head count figures, the number of GP positions is the sum of GPs in post and the number of vacancies. The numbers relate to the total from primary care organisations surveyed, not the country total.

³ The figures presented in the table for Scotland relate to eight of the ten PCTs that responded only, as not all of them could provide vacancy statistics.

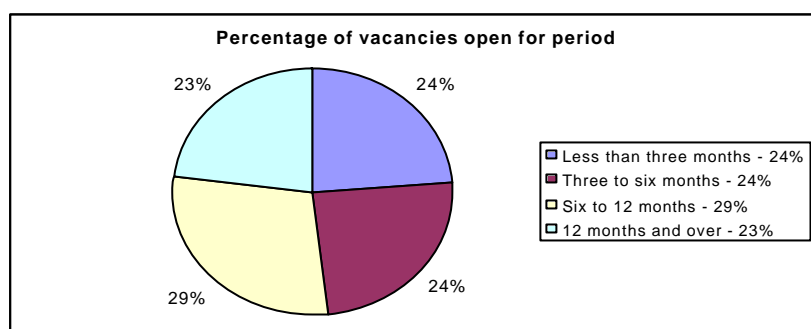


figure i - Length of time the vacancies were open in England

England

Government data

Each September the Government carries out a census of NHS staff. The Department of Health has also introduced a mini census carried out in April which surveys the NHS vacancy statistics and staff numbers in England. This supplements the September census to provide more regular indicators of workforce numbers. The results from the April census 2002 show the number of General Medical Practitioners working in the NHS as at 31 March 2002 (30,680 excluding GP retainers).⁴

The UK has a shortage of doctors. It falls far below comparable countries on its density of doctors. In 2000 it had 1.8 practising physicians per 1,000 population compared with an average of 3.29 among the European countries reported by the OECD for that year.⁵

The Department of Health's mini census of GPs in April 2002 gave an estimated 3 month vacancy rate of 2.8 per cent. The latest DoH vacancy rate figure published by the Department of Health in October 2002 based on fully validated returns is slightly lower at **2.7%**. This compares with an estimated vacancy rate of 1.7 per cent in the September 2001 census.

Only broad regional breakdowns are given in the DoH vacancy survey. The estimated three month vacancy rates are: South 2.1%; North 2.8%; London 3%; and Midlands and Eastern 3.5%. Wales, by comparison has an estimated 1.8% vacancy rate.

BMA vacancy survey results

There are 304 Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in England. Just under 60% of the 150 PCTs contacted by the BMA responded. Between the 89 Trusts that replied, the number of GPs in post totalled 8,816. Of the 89 respondents, only seven reported no vacancies. The total number of open vacancies stood at 412. When expressed as a percentage of the total number of GP positions available between the 89 PCTs, this equates to 4.7% of the total workforce. **If vacancies of less than three months standing are excluded, the percentage vacancy rate for England is 3.4%.**

Greenwich PCT reported the highest three month vacancy rate of 16%: 20 of the 125 available GP positions had been vacant for three months or more at the time of the survey. Of the 89 PCTs in England providing data, 14 had three month vacancy rates more than double the national average of 3.4%. Overall, more than half of the vacancies reported by the 89 PCTs had been unfilled for more than six months.

⁴ Mini census April 2002

⁵ OECD in figures 2002

The Government's vacancy statistics include only vacancies open for three months or more which trusts are actively trying to fill. For ease of comparison, we also analysed our data using this definition. To do this we removed from the calculations all vacancies which had been open for less than three months.

Including only vacancy rates of three months or more, the 89 English PCTs had 9,228 GP positions, 314 of which were vacant. On average PCTs, by this definition, had 3.40% of their positions vacant. This is noticeably greater than the 2.7% three month vacancy rate reported in the Department of Health General Practitioner Recruitment, Retention and Vacancy Survey 2002 England and Wales, published October 2002.

Figure ii - Table of results

| | Head count figure | Head count figures of three months or more |
|---|-------------------|--|
| Total number of GP positions in sample | 9,228 | 9,228 |
| Total number of vacancies in sample | 412 | 314 |
| Average vacancy rate | 4.7% | 3.40% |

Vacancies notified by individual primary care organisations England

| PCT | Establishment | In post | Vacancies | Of which: vacant more than 3 months | %Vacant more than 3 months |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------|-----------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Airdale | 75 | 71 | 4 | 4 | 5.33 |
| Ashford | 56 | 53 | 3 | 3 | 5.36 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 73 | 70 | 3 | 1 | 1.37 |
| Barnsley | 134 | 117 | 17 | 8 | 5.97 |
| Bath and North East Somerset | 111 | 110 | 1 | 1 | 0.90 |
| Bexley | 112 | 96 | 16 | 15 | 13.39 |
| Blackpool | 83 | 79 | 4 | 3 | 3.61 |
| Bolton | 155 | 149 | 6 | 6 | 3.87 |
| Brighton and Hove City | 153 | 148 | 5 | 1 | 0.65 |
| Bristol North | 144 | 143 | 1 | 1 | 0.69 |
| Bristol South and West | 126 | 125 | 1 | 1 | 0.79 |
| Bromley | 166 | 158 | 8 | 7 | 4.22 |
| Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale | 146 | 128 | 18 | 16 | 10.96 |
| Camden | 124 | 118 | 6 | 4 | 3.23 |
| Canterbury and Coastal | 98 | 96 | 2 | 2 | 2.04 |
| Central Cheshire | 136 | 134 | 2 | 2 | 1.47 |
| Central Cornwall | 124 | 124 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Central Manchester | 100 | 96 | 4 | 4 | 4.00 |
| Central Suffolk | 62 | 61 | 1 | 1 | 1.61 |
| Cheltenham and Tewkesbury | 96 | 93 | 3 | 1 | 1.04 |
| Cheshire West | 99 | 99 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Chorley and South Ribble | 111 | 108 | 3 | 1 | 0.90 |
| City and Hackney | 165 | 148 | 17 | 12 | 7.27 |
| Colchester | 91 | 89 | 2 | 1 | 1.10 |
| Cotswold and Vale | 125 | 125 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Coventry | 184 | 174 | 10 | 10 | 5.43 |
| Craven, Harrogate and Rural District | 145 | 140 | 5 | 3 | 2.07 |
| Croydon | 187 | 176 | 11 | 11 | 5.88 |
| Darlington | 64 | 61 | 3 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley | 130 | 125 | 5 | 5 | 3.85 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|-------|
| Derwentside | 49 | 41 | 8 | 4 | 8.16 |
| Doncaster Central | 57 | 54 | 3 | 2 | 3.51 |
| Doncaster East | 51 | 44 | 7 | 6 | 11.76 |
| Doncaster West | 60 | 50 | 10 | 5 | 8.33 |
| Durham and Chester-le-Street | 94 | 85 | 9 | 3 | 3.19 |
| Durham Dales | 53 | 49 | 4 | 4 | 7.55 |
| Easington | 49 | 48 | 1 | 1 | 2.04 |
| East Hampshire | 108 | 108 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Eastern Birmingham | 132 | 127 | 5 | 5 | 3.79 |
| Eastern Cheshire | 108 | 107 | 1 | 1 | 0.93 |
| Ellesmere Port & Neston | 49 | 47 | 2 | 2 | 4.08 |
| Fylde | 39 | 38 | 1 | 1 | 2.56 |
| Gateshead | 127 | 119 | 8 | 6 | 4.72 |
| Greenwich | 125 | 105 | 20 | 20 | 16.00 |
| Hambleton and Richmondshire | 73 | 72 | 1 | 1 | 1.37 |
| Havering | 112 | 110 | 2 | 2 | 1.79 |
| Heart of Birmingham Teaching | 130 | 128 | 2 | 2 | 1.54 |
| Hyndburn and Ribble Valley | 60 | 58 | 2 | 1 | 1.67 |
| Ipswich | 80 | 78 | 2 | 1 | 1.25 |
| Islington | 112 | 111 | 1 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Mendip | 72 | 71 | 1 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Newcastle | 172 | 169 | 3 | 3 | 1.74 |
| North and East Cornwall | 103 | 100 | 3 | 3 | 2.91 |
| North Birmingham | 92 | 91 | 1 | 1 | 1.09 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 99 | 85 | 14 | 13 | 13.13 |
| North Kirklees | 107 | 85 | 22 | 9 | 8.41 |
| North Lincolnshire | 92 | 86 | 6 | 5 | 5.43 |
| North Somerset | 125 | 124 | 1 | 1 | 0.80 |
| North Tyneside | 125 | 121 | 4 | 1 | 0.80 |
| Northamptonshire Heartlands | 152 | 141 | 11 | 4 | 2.63 |
| Oldbury and Smethwick | 60 | 56 | 4 | 3 | 5.00 |
| Redditch and Bromsgrove | 98 | 97 | 1 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Richmond and Twickenham | 102 | 98 | 4 | 4 | 3.92 |
| Rowley-Regis and Tipton | 42 | 40 | 2 | 2 | 4.76 |
| Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale | 113 | 109 | 4 | 4 | 3.54 |
| Sedgefield | 52 | 50 | 2 | 2 | 3.85 |
| Selby and York | 176 | 173 | 3 | 2 | 1.14 |
| Sheffield South West | 82 | 78 | 4 | 4 | 4.88 |
| Sheffield West | 81 | 78 | 3 | 2 | 2.47 |
| Somerset Coast | 96 | 94 | 2 | 2 | 2.08 |
| South Birmingham | 225 | 219 | 6 | 5 | 2.22 |
| South East Sheffield | 111 | 109 | 2 | 2 | 1.80 |
| South Gloucestershire | 132 | 132 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| South Peterborough | 59 | 53 | 6 | 3 | 5.08 |
| South Tyneside | 85 | 83 | 2 | 1 | 1.18 |
| South Worcestershire | 165 | 165 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Southend on Sea | 96 | 85 | 11 | 10 | 10.42 |
| St Albans and Harpenden | 76 | 74 | 2 | 1 | 1.32 |
| Suffolk Coastal | 63 | 57 | 6 | 6 | 9.52 |
| Suffolk West | 128 | 120 | 8 | 8 | 6.25 |
| Sunderland Teaching | 162 | 160 | 2 | 2 | 1.23 |
| Taunton Deane | 75 | 74 | 1 | 1 | 1.33 |
| Waveney | 77 | 71 | 6 | 6 | 7.79 |
| Wednesbury and West Bromwich | 67 | 61 | 6 | 6 | 8.96 |
| West Gloucestershire | 128 | 125 | 3 | 2 | 1.56 |
| West Lancashire | 58 | 56 | 2 | 1 | 1.72 |
| West of Cornwall | 104 | 101 | 3 | 3 | 2.88 |
| Wyre | 65 | 64 | 1 | 1 | 1.54 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------|------|------|-----|-----|------|
| Wyre Forest | 68 | 68 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Total | 9228 | 8816 | 412 | 314 | 3.40 |

Wales

A GP workforce census is carried out by the government annually on 30 September. In 2002, an additional census was held on 31 March. Total headcount figures for GPs were 1,785 and 1,792 respectively.

BMA vacancy survey results

The 6 Local Health Groups responding to the BMA survey had 393 GP positions between them. There were 15 vacancies reported of which 11 had been unfilled for three months or longer. Overall the three month plus vacant positions represented 2.80% of the GP positions available. A three month vacancy rate of 1.8% for Wales was given in the DoH GP Recruitment, Retention and Vacancy Survey 2002 published in October 2002.

Wales

| PCO | Establishment | In post | Vacancies | Of which vacant more than 3 months | % vacant more than 3 months |
|---------------|---------------|---------|-----------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Anglesey | 46 | 44 | 2 | 2 | 4.35 |
| Denbighshire | 56 | 54 | 2 | 3 | 5.36 |
| Gwynedd | 94 | 91 | 3 | 2 | 2.13 |
| Monmouthshire | 58 | 57 | 1 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Torfaen | 61 | 59 | 2 | 2 | 3.28 |
| Wrexham | 78 | 73 | 5 | 2 | 2.56 |
| Total | 393 | 378 | 15 | 11 | 2.80 |

Scotland

A census of the NHS workforce in Scotland is conducted annually for late September/October. In 2000, the GP workforce headcount came to 4,070. In the following year it reached 4,149. This represents an increase of 1.94% in the GP workforce from 2000 to 2001. Data from the Information Statistics Division, Scotland shows that in October 2001 the number of unrestricted principal vacated posts totalled 42 for Scotland. This equated to 1.00% of the total GP positions. This did not include newly approved posts that were unfilled at the time of data collection.

BMA vacancy survey results

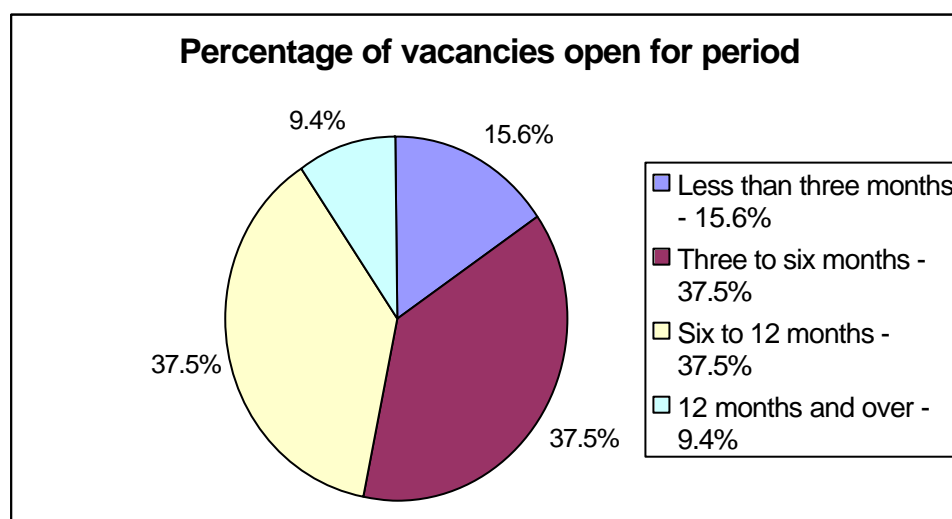
Of the 13 Primary Care Organisations contacted in Scotland, ten responded. Between those ten Trusts, the GP workforce totalled 3129 positions. Only eight of the Trusts could give information on vacancies: the total reported vacancies came to 44 of which 31 had been unfilled for three months or longer. The three month vacancies represented 0.99% of the GP positions available.

Of the PCTs that provided data on vacancies, each had at least two open vacancies. Forth Valley had the highest notified three month vacancy rate of 3.35% Long term vacancies are a problem in Scotland with just under half of all vacancies being unfilled for six months or longer.

Scotland

| PCO | Establishment | In post | Vacancies | Of which vacant more than 3 months | % vacant more than 3 months |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------|-----------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Ayrshire & Arran | 285 | 279 | 6 | 1 | 0.35 |
| Dumfries & Galloway | 137 | 132 | 5 | 1 | 0.73 |
| Fife | 250 | 248 | 2 | 2 | 0.80 |
| Forth Valley | 209 | 209 | 0 | 7 | 3.35 |
| Grampian | 393 | 389 | 4 | 5 | 1.27 |
| Greater Glasgow | 648 | 638 | 10 | 6 | 0.93 |
| Lomond & Argyll | 131 | 126 | 5 | 2 | 1.53 |
| Lothian | N/A | 579 | N/A | 5 | 0.86 |
| Refrewhshire & Inverclyde | 198 | 192 | 6 | 1 | 0.51 |
| Tayside | N/A | 293 | N/A | 1 | 0.34 |
| Total | 3129+ | 3085 | 44+ | 31 | 0.99 |

Scotland



Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland does not experience the same vacancy difficulties as the rest of the UK, but is not free from problems. A workforce planning review in progress indicates a need to train significantly more general practitioners in the coming years to avoid a workforce shortage.

BMA vacancy survey results

The four Health and Social Services Boards in Northern Ireland each responded to requests for information relating to GP workforces. Between them the number of GPs in post came to 1,074. Two of the Boards reported single vacancies representing less than one per cent of the total workforce.

Northern Ireland

| PCO | Establishment | In post | Vacancies | Of which vacant more than 3 months | % vacant more than 3 months |
|----------|---------------|---------|-----------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Northern | 250 | 250 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Southern | 208 | 207 | 1 | 1 | 0.48 |
| Western | 186 | 186 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Eastern | 432 | 431 | 1 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Total | 1076 | 1074 | 2 | 1 | 0.09 |

