



## **Our data about doctors with a European primary medical qualification in 2017**

Following the vote to leave the European Union (EU), we've had a large number of requests for data on the European medical workforce in the UK. We've produced this report to make our data in this area as useful as possible to those who want to understand more about the makeup of this workforce.

This paper is an update to a previous paper on the same topic\* and gives a summary of our latest data on doctors who gained their primary medical qualification in the European Economic Area (EEA) and who have a licence to practise medicine in the UK.

In this paper we give updated data on the location, area of practice, and years of experience of EEA graduate doctors, and we highlight sections of the profession with a higher concentration. We also present data on the profile of EEA graduates in each country of the UK, and look at how many EEA graduates are joining and leaving UK medical practice. Data are not directly comparable with the previous paper as we have moved to using June 30 as the annual sample point for the number of doctors in a given year – this change allows us to report on data within the same calendar year rather than only presenting historical data.

### **Why do we report primary medical qualification?**

The data we hold by country of primary medical qualification are 100% accurate. A significant number of doctors qualify from a medical school in a country of which they are not a citizen, so their primary medical qualification is not a reliable proxy for their nationality.

Although we collect data on doctors' nationalities when they join the register, these data are not subsequently updated. In addition, we only have partial data on those who joined the register before 2004. Finally, we would not know if a doctor has an entitlement to a

\* *Our data about doctors with a European primary medical qualification (2015)* is available at [www.gmc-uk.org/publications/30409.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/publications/30409.asp).

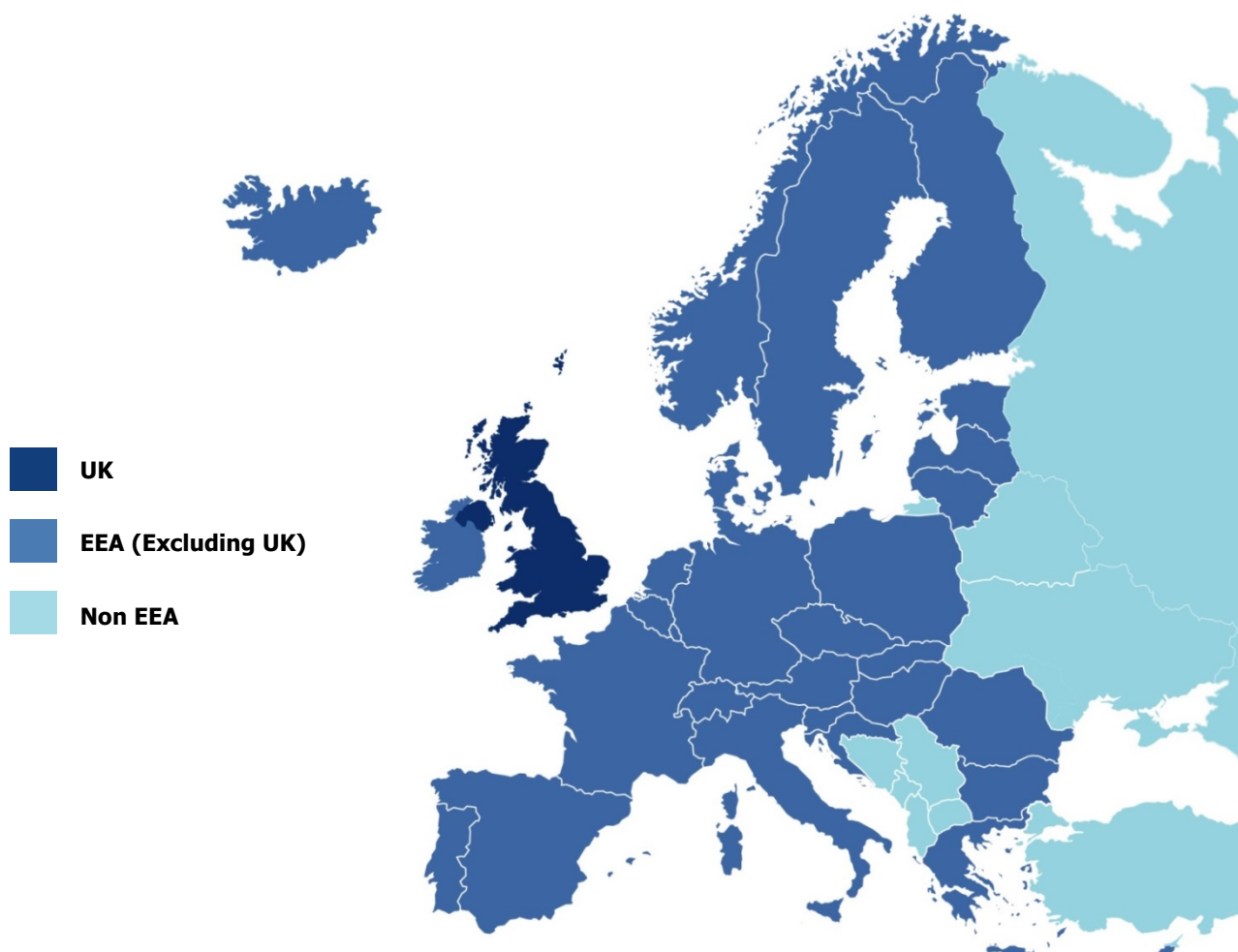
different nationality, other than the one they declared when they registered with us, which he or she has not yet claimed.

## What do we mean by EEA doctors?

For the purposes of this analysis, we have defined EEA doctors as those who gained their primary medical qualification from a medical school in the EEA or Switzerland but not the UK.

It's important to note that the EEA is not the same thing as the European Union. To put it simply, the EEA includes all of the EU countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Although Switzerland is not a member of the EEA, it is a member of single market agreements and Swiss nationals have the same right to live and work in the UK as other EEA nationals.

**Figure 1:** A map showing how we define the EEA

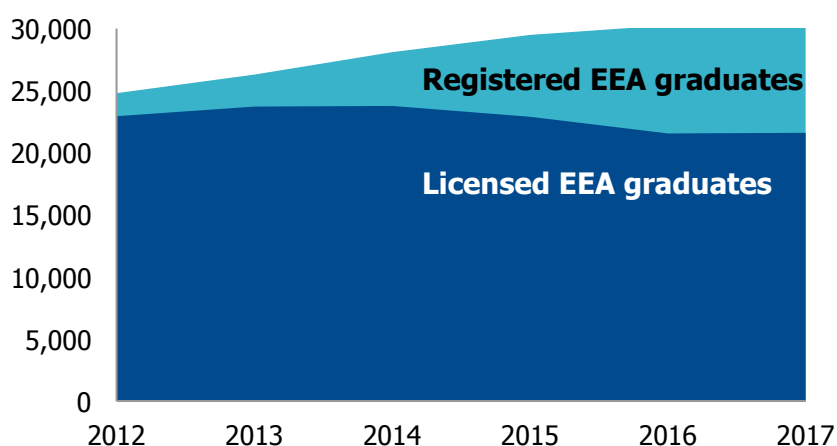


# The changing picture

## Doctors with a licence to practise

In this paper, we focus on doctors with a licence to practise. To practise medicine in the UK, doctors must be licensed with us – but not all licensed doctors are practising in the UK.

**Figure 2:** The number of licensed and registered EEA graduates on the UK medical register as at June 30 each year



Until June 2014, EEA graduates who joined the medical register were automatically licensed. But since June 2014, EEA graduates must now show proof of their English language capability before they gain a licence to practise. This may help to explain why the number of registered EEA graduates has increased over time, yet the number of licensed doctors has decreased (figure 2).

In 2017, there were 21,609 EEA graduates who had a licence to practise in the UK – nearly a tenth of the workforce. Since 2013, the number of licensed EEA graduates has gone down (table 1), both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the workforce.

**Table 1:** Number of licensed doctors in the UK

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>EEA graduates</b>	23,717	23,792	22,873	21,539	21,609
<b>All doctors</b>	234,675	233,498	232,330	232,192	236,732
<b>% of all licensed doctors who are EEA graduates</b>	10.1%	10.2%	9.8%	9.3%	9.1%

## Joiners and leavers from the EEA

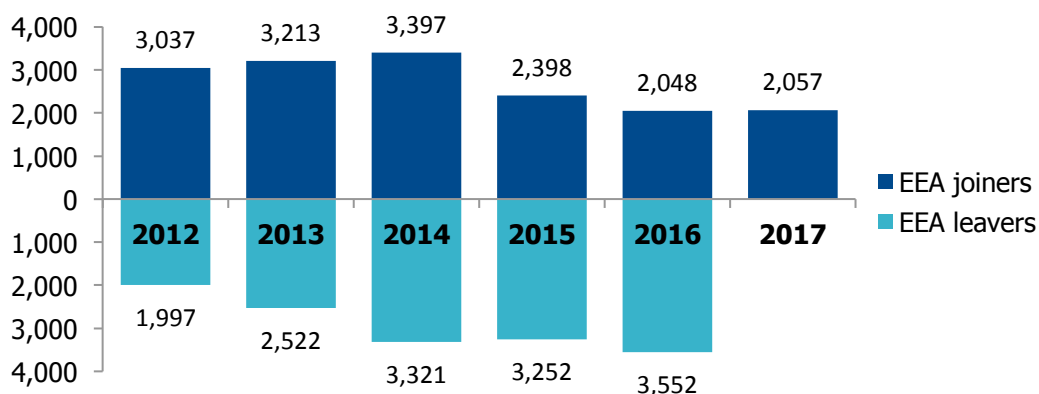
Following the introduction of English language requirements, the number of new joiners to the register dropped markedly from 2014 to 2015. From 2012 to 2014, the number of EEA graduates joining the profession increased, but that trend stopped in 2015. Since then fewer doctors than in 2012 have joined each year. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of EEA graduates leaving has almost doubled, which has been a steady increase over time (figure 3)

A doctor counts as joining the profession where they have a licence to practise in that year but did not have one the previous year. A doctor leaving the profession is one who was licensed, but has not held a licence for at least one year – in this way, we do not count doctors who leave for short periods of time and re-join the profession the next year as a leaver.

We don't have 2017 data for EEA graduates leaving the register or relinquishing their licence, as we count them here as leaving only if they've left for a full year.

As with other figures through this paper that relate to the number of licensed doctors on the register – data are not comparable to previous papers as the data for each year are as of June 30 instead of December 31.

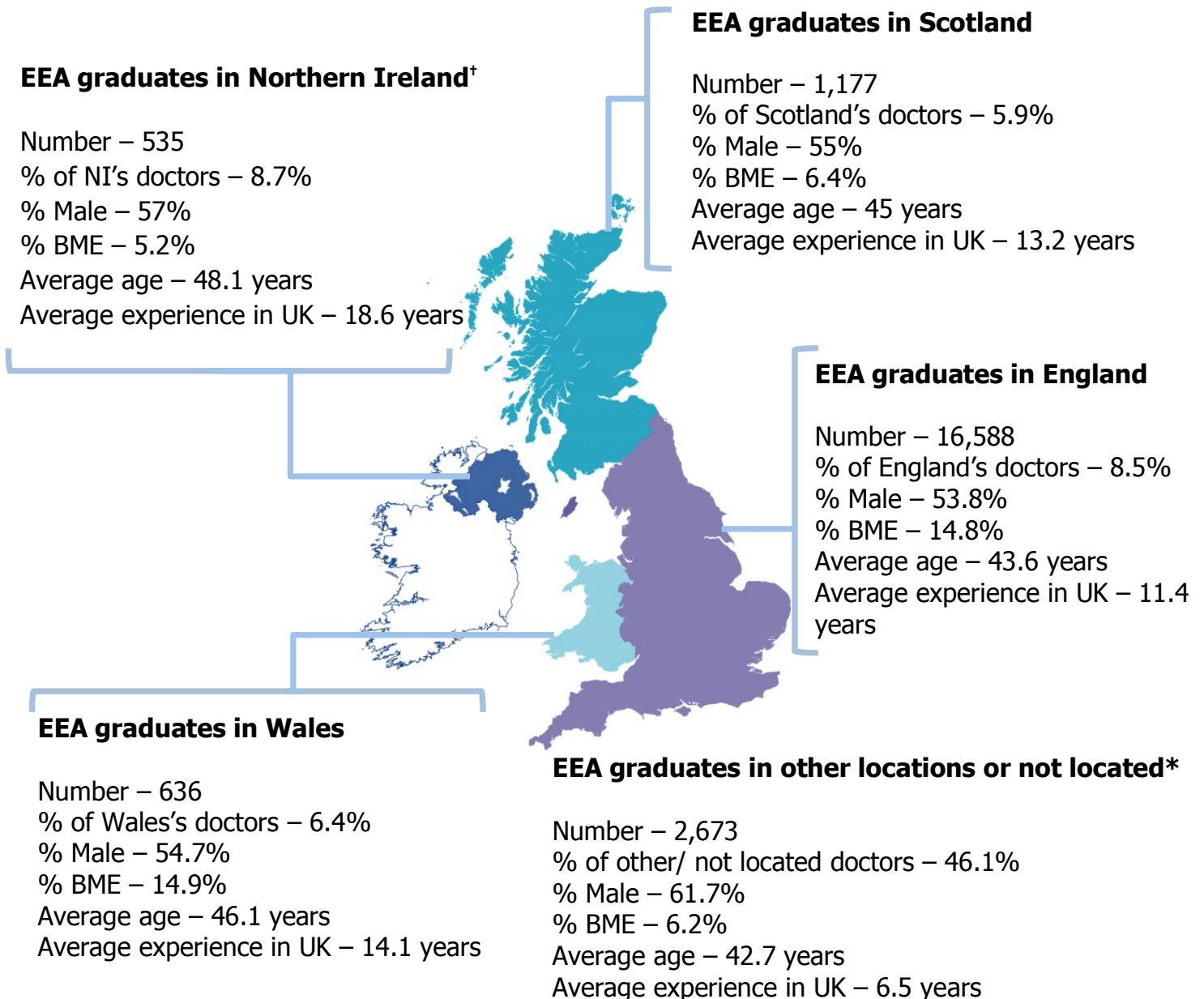
**Figure 3:** The number of EEA graduates joining (gaining a licence) or leaving (relinquishing a licence to practise for at least one year)



# EEA graduates in each UK country in 2017

We have allocated doctors to a country based on a combination of their workplace address, the organisation they are linked to for revalidation and, where neither of these is suitable, their correspondence address. 98% of all doctors and 88% of EEA doctors could be allocated to a country in this way.

**Figure 6:** Characteristics of licensed EEA graduates by UK country in 2017



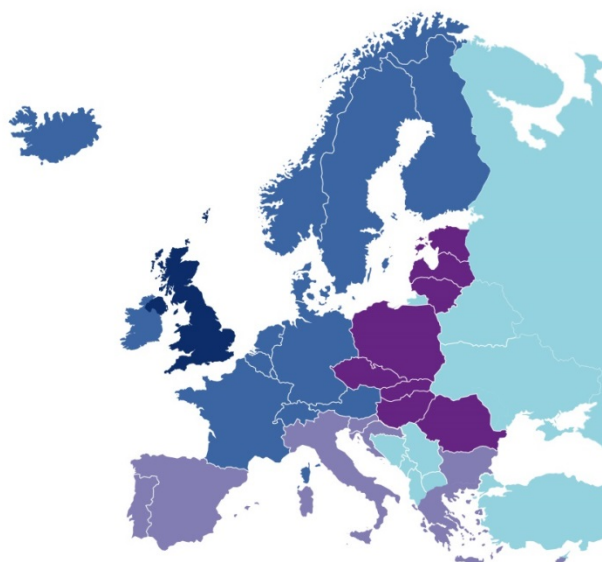
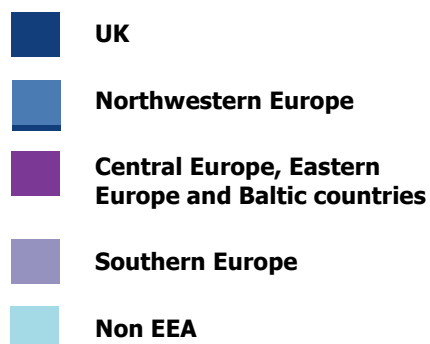
\* This includes 1,494 doctors who are linked to a UK designated body for revalidation but who could not be linked to a specific region. The remaining 1,179 doctors may not have given a valid postcode for their address, or did not have a UK address or a designated body in the UK for revalidation, and their correspondence address was not in the UK.

<sup>†</sup> 386 out of 535 EEA graduates in Northern Ireland gained their primary medical qualification in the Republic of Ireland – 72%.

## Regional breakdown of the EEA

We define Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Baltic countries, Northwestern Europe and Southern Europe as groupings of the following countries:

**Figure 4:** A regional breakdown of the EEA



**Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Baltic countries (EEA):** Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

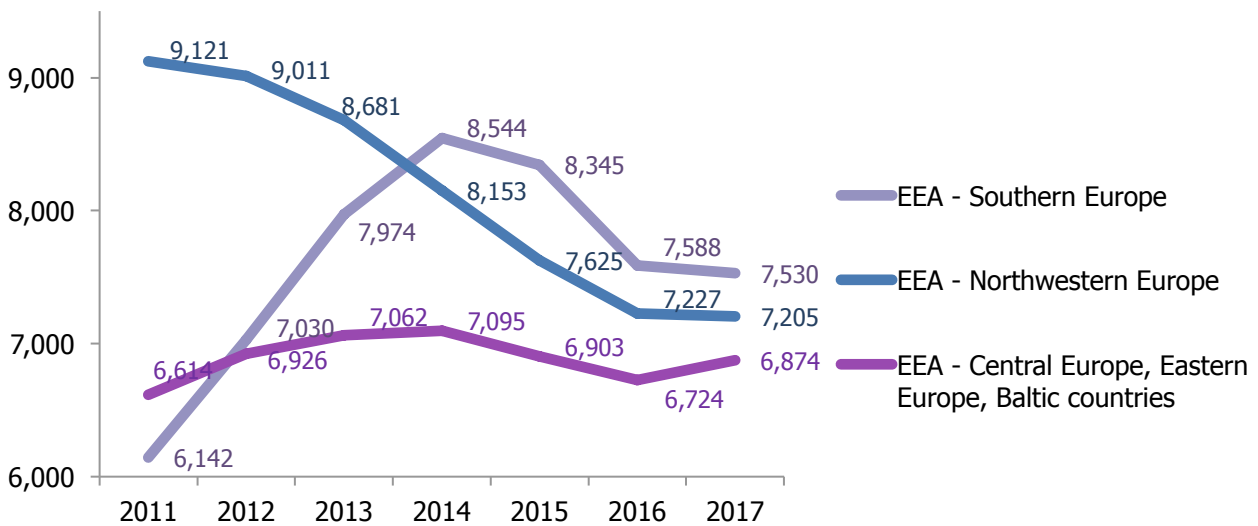
**Northwestern Europe (EEA):** Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

**Southern Europe (EEA):** Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

## Where in the EEA did our doctors qualify?

Between 2014 and 2016, the number of licensed EEA graduates from each region of the EEA declined. The number of licensed EEA graduates from Central Europe increased from 2016 to 2017. The peak in Southern European graduates happened in 2014, at the same time as the introduction of new English language requirements for all doctors coming to practise in the UK (figure 5).

**Figure 5:** Number of licensed doctors on the medical register from each European region































## EEA graduates by country of qualification and area of practice

Ireland is the most common country of qualification for EEA graduates, and the least common is Iceland. There are over 10,000 licensed doctors on the Specialist Register (only) that are EEA graduates, over half (5,458) of whom graduated from just four countries – Ireland, Greece, Italy and Germany.



**Table 2:** Number of licensed doctors from each EEA country by register type in 2017

Rank	EEA country	Doctors with UK licence	Register type				
			GP only	Specialist only	GP and specialist*	Neither and not in training	Neither and in training
1	 Ireland	3,174	776	1,440	18	571	369
2	 Greece	2,471	50	1,559	4	566	292
3	 Italy	2,190	108	1,402	18	548	114
4	 Germany	2,071	561	1,057	28	334	91
5	 Romania	2,062	210	715	12	917	208
6	 Poland	1,736	199	751	22	427	337
7	 Spain	1,269	301	676	31	237	24
8	 Czech Republic	1,097	169	323	3	394	208
9	 Hungary	1,073	65	655	17	262	74
10	 Bulgaria	725	51	337	8	289	40
11	 Netherlands	701	204	255	1	197	44
12	 Malta	397	9	151	0	96	141
13	 France	370	106	185	9	65	5
14	 Slovakia	344	20	156	1	131	36
15	 Lithuania	317	34	160	3	85	35
16	 Portugal	253	27	119	0	76	31
17	 Belgium	247	54	114	2	69	8
18	 Austria	214	55	70	11	48	30
19	 Latvia	203	17	75	1	74	36
20	 Croatia	187	10	92	0	68	17
21	 Sweden	126	10	82	2	24	8
22	 Switzerland	110	3	57	3	46	1
23	 Denmark	98	21	47	1	18	11
24	 Finland	46	10	19	5	11	1
25	 Estonia	42	6	27	0	6	3
26	 Slovenia	38	3	18	0	11	6
27	 Iceland	25	1	14	0	7	3
28	 Norway	23	5	10	0	6	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>21,609</b>	<b>3,085</b>	<b>10,566</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>5,583</b>	<b>2,175</b>

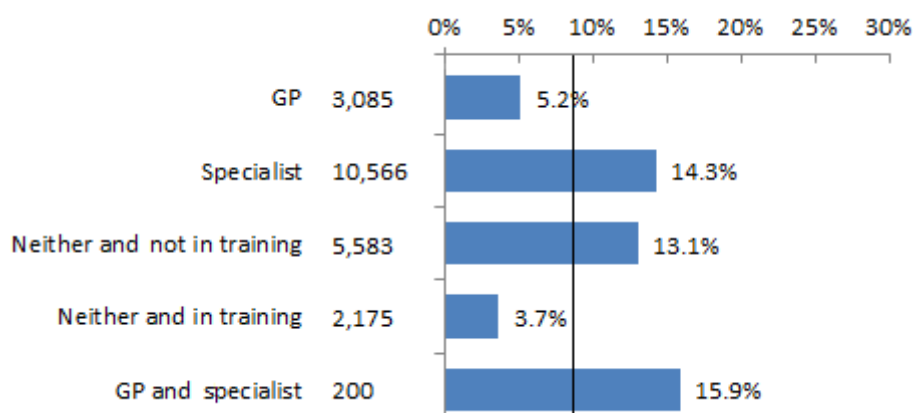
\* These doctors are not double counted in the GP or specialist columns.

## Areas of practice of EEA graduates

In 2017, 9.1% of all licensed doctors were EEA graduates. Figure 7 shows the proportion of EEA graduates that make up the total number of licensed doctors in each area of practice. The line on figure 7 represents total proportional representation across all areas of practice (9.1%). Any bar greater than the line shows an overrepresentation of EEA graduates in this area of practice and anything under shows an underrepresentation compared to average.

EEA graduates are underrepresented in the GP workforce: 5.2% of doctors on the GP register are EEA graduates, compared to the 9.1% average. European graduates are more likely to be on the Specialist Register, or be on neither register and not in training (figure 7).

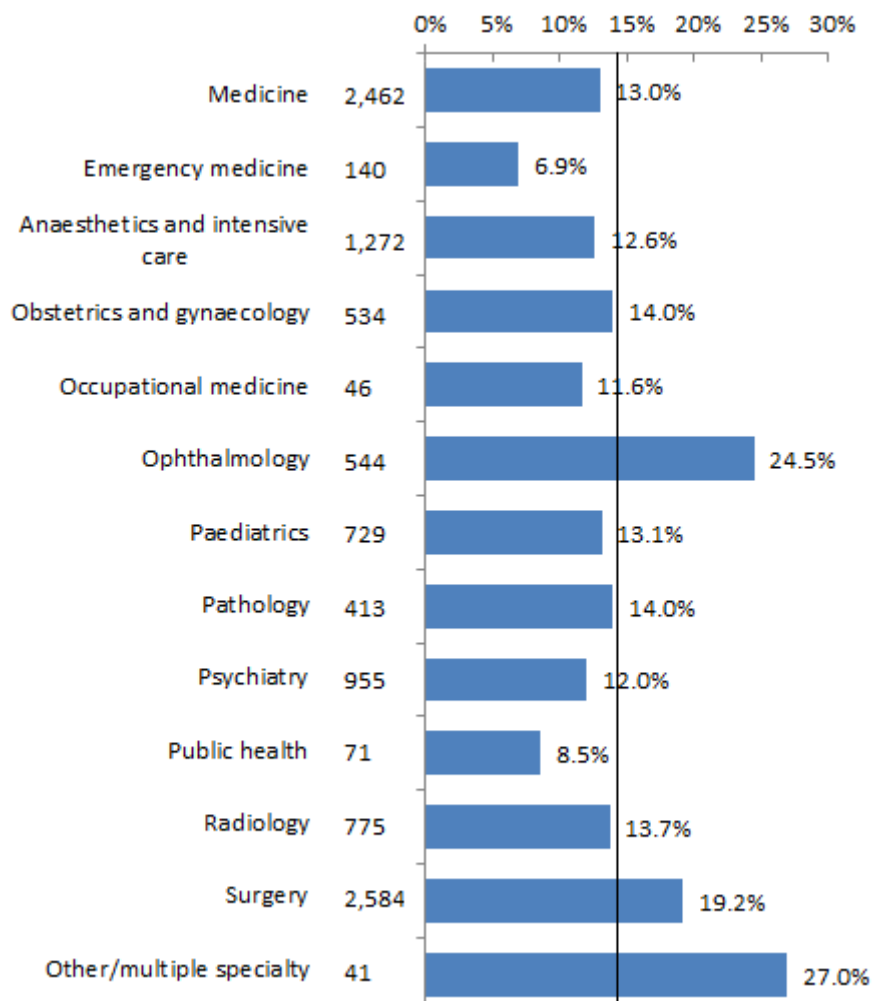
**Figure 7:** All licensed EEA graduate doctors by register type, showing % of each register type that are EEA graduates in 2017



Some specialty areas are particularly dependent on EEA graduate doctors such as surgery and ophthalmology where around a fifth of doctors are EEA graduates (19% and 24% respectively, see figure 8).

Obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, pathology, medicine and radiology also rely on EEA graduates more than the average across all doctors, with 13% to 14% of doctors being EEA graduates in those specialties compared to 9.1% of all licensed doctors.

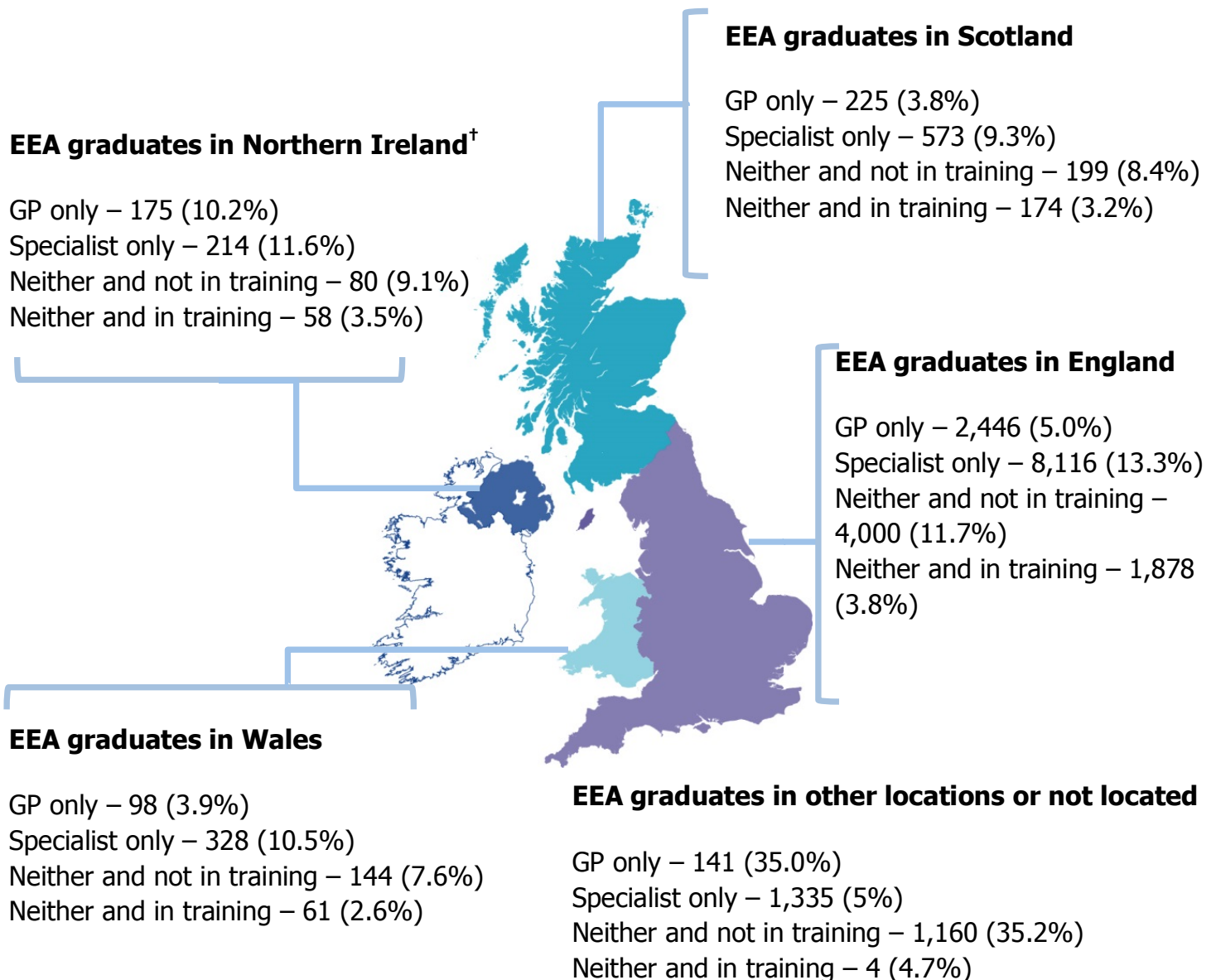
**Figure 8:** All licensed EEA graduate doctors on the Specialist Register only, showing % of each specialty group that are EEA graduates in 2017



## Four country data on EEA graduates by area of practice

Our data shows that EEA graduate specialists are overrepresented across all four UK countries. GPs are generally underrepresented by EEA graduates in all UK countries except for Northern Ireland, where 10.2% (175) of GPs are EEA graduates, of which 87% (152) qualified in Ireland. Scotland, Wales and England have relatively low reliance on EEA GPs with 3.9% to 5.0% of their GPs qualified in the EEA (figure 9).

**Figure 9:** Number and proportion of licensed EEA graduates by UK country, by register type\* in 2017



\* This graphic excludes doctors who are on both the GP and Specialist Registers. The data presented show, for example, there are 50,090 doctors who are on the GP register only in England in total and of those, 2,446 were EEA graduates. Therefore, the percentage of GPs in England that are EEA graduates is 5%.

<sup>†</sup> 386 (72%) of all EEA graduates in Northern Ireland qualified in Ireland.

## The differences between the four countries

As previously reported, there are a similar proportion of EEA graduates in each broad area of practice in Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland has the greatest proportion of EEA graduates who are GPs than any other UK country. England has the most EEA graduate specialists and EEA graduates who are on neither register and not in training. It is difficult to make comparisons about the numbers of doctors within each speciality group in the four countries of the UK due to the small numbers of EEA graduates involved.

**Table 3:** EEA graduates in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland by area of practice

	England		Northern Ireland		Scotland	
	Number of EEA doctors	Proportion of total that are EEA	Number of EEA doctors	Proportion of total that are EEA	Number of EEA doctors	Proportion of total that are EEA
<b>GP only</b>	2,446	5.0%	175	10.2%	225	3.8%
<b>Specialist only</b>	8,116	13.3%	214	11.6%	573	9.3%
Medicine	2,004	12.7%	37	7.9%	116	7.4%
Emergency medicine	111	6.7%	6	8.5%	12	5.4%
Anaesthetics and intensive care	967	11.8%	27	9.9%	81	9.4%
Obstetrics and gynaecology	395	12.7%	18	15.8%	18	5.8%
Occupational medicine	29	9.4%	–	0%	5	10.4%
Ophthalmology	404	22.3%	7	17.5%	13	8.7%
Paediatrics	588	12.5%	15	13.5%	37	9.8%
Pathology	323	13.4%	7	9.2%	35	12.7%
Psychiatry	806	12.2%	20	10.4%	48	6.6%
Public health	43	6.6%	6	20.7%	8	8.3%
Radiology	503	11.1%	25	14.7%	48	10.5%
Surgery	1,912	17.3%	45	15.5%	150	13.9%
Other/ multiple specialties	31	25.0%	1	33.3%	2	15.4%
<b>GP and specialist</b>	148	14.8%	8	22.2%	6	4.9%
<b>Neither and not in training</b>	4,000	11.7%	80	9.1%	199	8.4%
<b>Neither and in training</b>	1,878	3.8%	58	3.5%	174	3.2%

There is a very high proportion of EEA licensed graduates who have a location outside the four countries of the UK or who we cannot locate. Given that there are 2,673 licensed doctors in this group, it is highly likely that these numbers of located doctors are underestimates.

**Table 4:** EEA graduates in Wales and those with an unknown location by area of practice

	Wales		Other	
	Number of EEA doctors	Proportion of total that are EEA	Number of EEA doctors	Proportion of total that are EEA
<b>GP only</b>	98	3.9%	141	35.0%
<b>Specialist only</b>	328	10.5%	1,335	68.1%
Medicine	54	7.0%	251	60.0%
Emergency Medicine	2	2.6%	9	39.1%
Anaesthetics and Intensive Care	75	14.5%	122	67.0%
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	24	13.6%	79	71.8%
Occupational medicine	0	0%	12	57.1%
Ophthalmology	9	11.5%	111	79.3%
Paediatrics	30	12.6%	59	52.2%
Pathology	8	7.1%	40	54.8%
Psychiatry	29	8.9%	52	50.0%
Public Health	8	20.5%	6	27.3%
Radiology	19	8.3%	180	68.7%
Surgery	69	12.4%	408	83.8%
Other / multiple specialties	1	16.7%	6	100.0%
<b>GP and specialist</b>	5	9.4%	33	71.7%
<b>Neither and not in training</b>	144	7.6%	1,160	35.2%
<b>Neither and in training</b>	61	2.6%	4	4.7%

## Years of UK experience

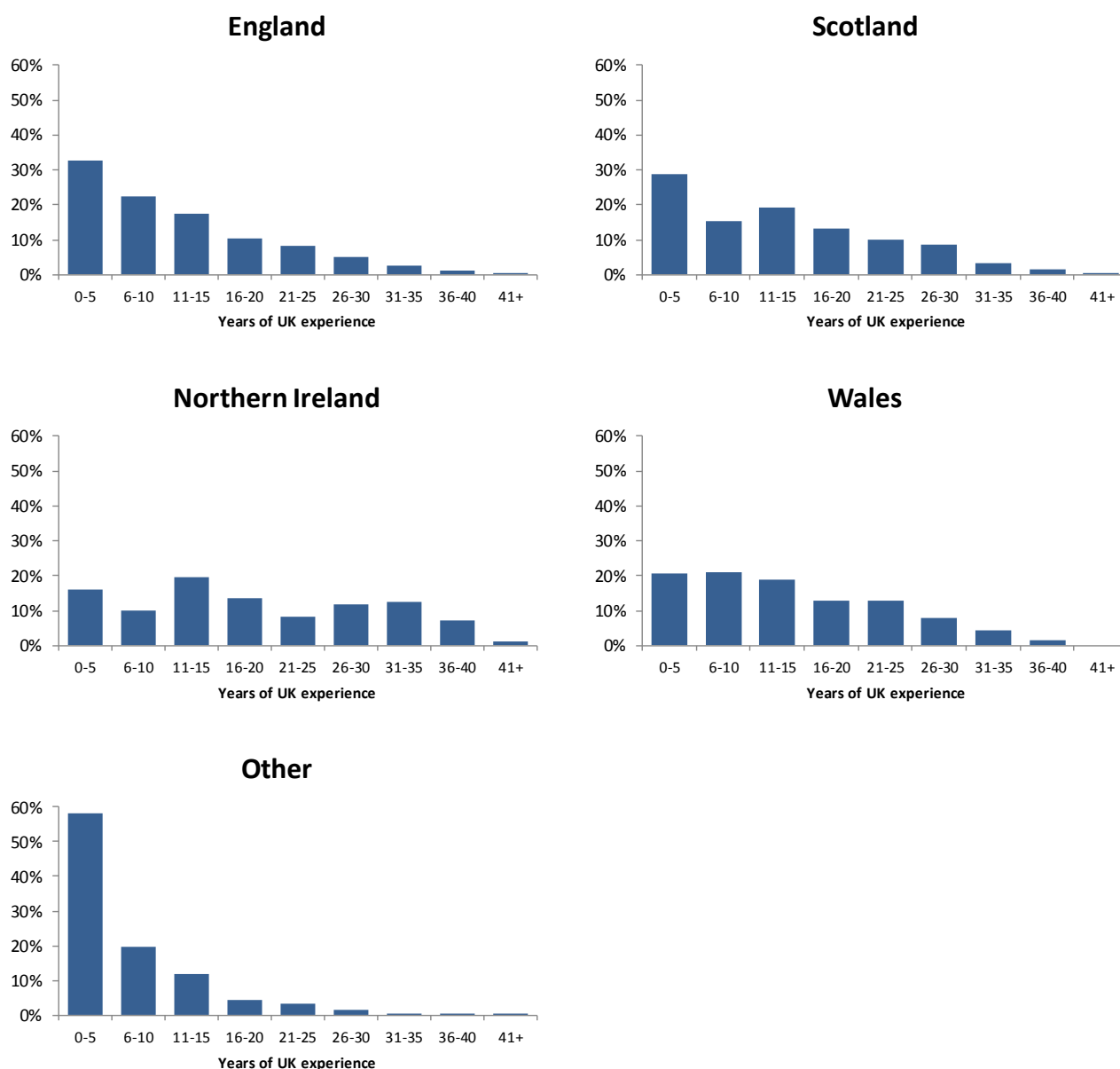
Experience is defined here as the number of years that a doctor has had a UK licence to practise (for those joining before 2009, we use the date they joined the medical register).

About a third of (32%) of EEA graduates located in the UK have 0 to 5 years of experience of working here; over half (53%) have fewer than ten years of experience.

Northern Ireland has a comparatively even distribution of doctors across all experience levels, and has a higher proportion of EEA graduates who have over ten years of experience than any other country of the UK. This is likely to be a result of doctors who qualified in the Republic of Ireland practising in Northern Ireland.

In locating doctors, we use a combination of data about where they are practising. We couldn't assign a UK location to 12% of EEA doctors – these doctors may be overseas, or may not have given a valid UK postcode. 58% of these doctors have between 0 and 5 years of UK experience.

**Figure 10:** Years of UK experience of EEA graduates in each UK country in 2017



## Conclusion

EEA graduates made up 9.1% of licensed doctors in 2017, having declined from a record 10.2% in 2014. The Specialist Register had a particularly high proportion of European graduates (14%). Surgery and ophthalmology were the most reliant on EEA graduates, where around a fifth were EEA graduates (19% and 24% respectively).

Due to the large number of Republic of Ireland graduates working there, Northern Ireland had a relatively high reliance on EEA graduates (8.7%) compared to Scotland (5.9%) and Wales (6.4%). England also has a higher reliance on EEA doctors (8.5%), but from a broader range of countries than Northern Ireland.

## **Limitations of our analysis**

This paper has looked at doctors with a primary medical qualification in the EEA, but this does not mean these doctors are EEA nationals. We only have partial data on the nationality of doctors at the time of their registration.

## **Understanding the contribution of EEA graduate doctors**

Overall, the data in this paper show that EEA graduates account for nearly 10% of the medical workforce and account for even more than this in some specialties. We also show how the overall numbers have been changing.

## **The impact of leaving the European Union**

Our health services benefit considerably from the contribution of doctors who have come from Europe and all around the world to practise medicine in the UK. We've been clear that we don't expect EU withdrawal to have any detrimental effect on the registration status of any doctor who qualified in the European Economic Area (EEA) who is already on the medical register.

Any sudden reduction in the number of EEA graduate doctors would clearly have a significant effect on the supply of doctors in some areas.

We have not observed a reduction in the number of EEA graduates on the medical register since the referendum itself, nor in the number who have joined the medical profession from EEA countries – however it remains too early to be certain what impact any changes to the UK's relationship with the EU might have on the profession.

We will watch what happens with Brexit and any developments to the UK constitutional settlement closely, as these might apply to the four countries of the UK. We have no view on the decision to leave the European Union as such, but have a longstanding position that we would like to be able to check that doctors coming to practise here from Europe meet the same standards as those who qualify in the UK and outside Europe.



Email: [gmc@gmc-uk.org](mailto:gmc@gmc-uk.org)  
Website: [www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org)  
Telephone: **0161 923 6602**

General Medical Council, 3 Hardman Street, Manchester M3 3AW

Textphone: **please dial the prefix 18001** then  
**0161 923 6602** to use the Text Relay service

## Join the conversation

 [@gmcuk](https://twitter.com/gmcuk)       [facebook.com/gmcuk](https://facebook.com/gmcuk)  
 [linkd.in/gmcuk](https://linkd.in/gmcuk)       [youtube.com/gmcuktv](https://youtube.com/gmcuktv)

This information can be made available in alternative formats or languages. To request an alternative format, please call us on **0161 923 6602** or email us at [publications@gmc-uk.org](mailto:publications@gmc-uk.org).

Published November 2017

© 2017 General Medical Council

The text of this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing it is reproduced accurately and not in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as GMC copyright and the document title specified.

The GMC is a charity registered in England and Wales (1089278) and Scotland (SC037750)

Code: GMC/DADEPMQ/1117

General  
Medical  
Council