

Using the Electronic Staff Record (ESR) to Describe the NHS Cancer Workforce

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Background

Within the UK there are long-standing pressures on the NHS cancer workforce, and one of the barriers to addressing these is that there is no agreed definition of what constitutes the cancer workforce.

The Electronic Staff Record (ESR) is an NHS England payroll system, with a secondary function of describing workforce composition that is currently underutilised. An extensive range of information is captured such as tertiary area of work, job title, care setting, age, pay band and nationality. ESR represents a valuable resource for monitoring, modelling and planning the cancer workforce.

Macmillan aimed to improve understanding of the current ESR system and how the cancer workforce is described within it.

Methods

Following a data request to NHS England, we studied aggregated ESR records between 2009 and 2022. We classified each selection as 'cancer-related' where a clear link to cancer or palliative care was found in the 'tertiary area of work' attribute. Where the name alone was insufficient, such as 'breast surgery', Macmillan's clinical experts assessed whether cancer was expected to account for the majority of care activity.

These data are as submitted by individual NHS organisations and are not subject to the full range of validation procedures undertaken by NHS England in relation to other data items used in official publications. Please note primary care is not captured within the ESR system.

References

1. NHS, 2023, Customer specified HCHS workforce data pack - September 2009 to 2022; <https://digital.nhs.uk/supplementary-information/2023/hchs-cancer-workforce-data-pack#request> (Accessed May 2023)

Results

Our working definition identified around 37,000 headcount as belonging to the England cancer workforce in September 2022, with 88% identified as working full time. The data shows the leaver rate in the year to September 2022 was

12.1% (4,378 staff), the highest rate recorded within the period studied. Additionally, almost one in five (19.7%) staff were aged 55 or over as of September 2022.

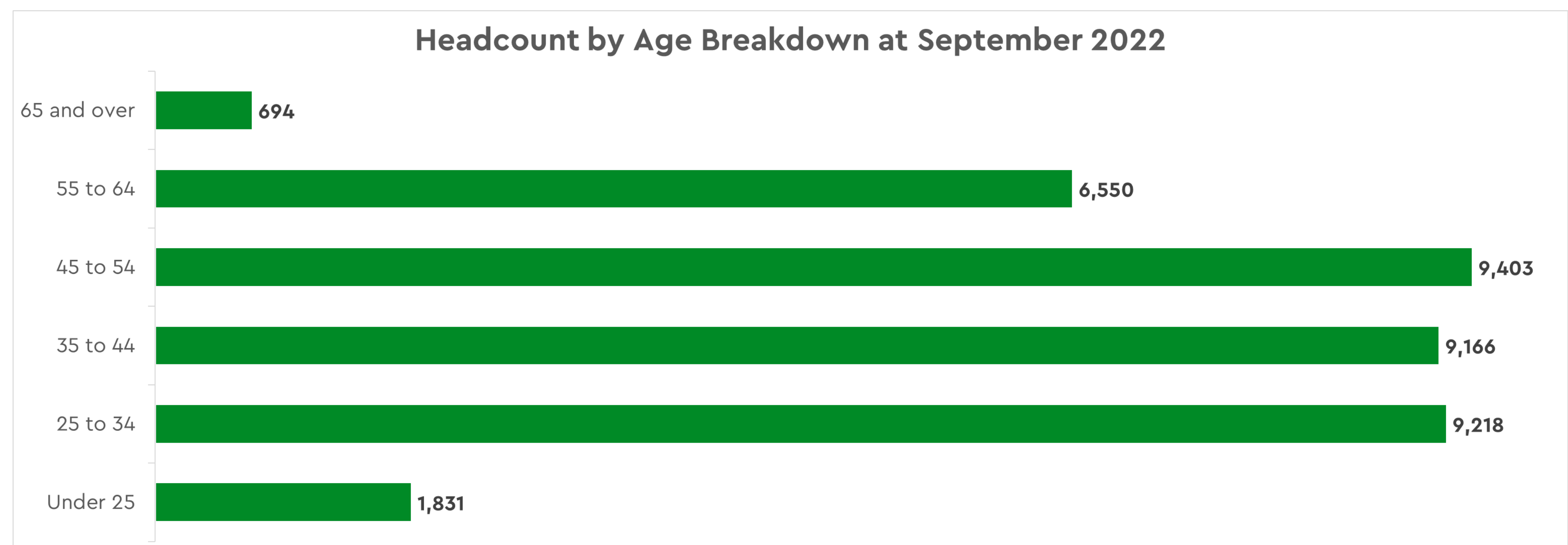


Figure 1: Showing the headcount of 'cancer workforce' as defined in the data request by ESR age bands at September 2022

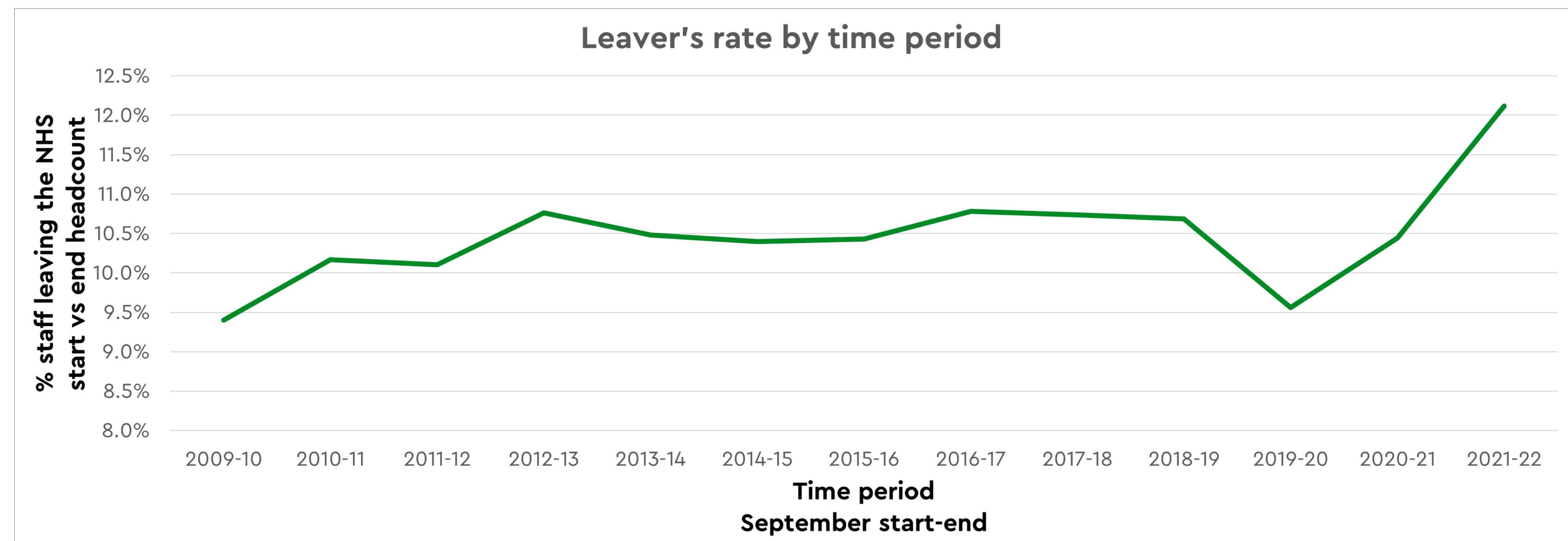


Figure 2: Showcasing the overall NHS leaver's rate within the 'cancer workforce' as defined in the data request overtime, time periods running September to September

Conclusions

This work delivers an initial working definition for identifying cancer-related workforce in England. Further work with the NHS and partners is required to agree a standardised definition to enable the monitoring, modelling and planning of the cancer workforce, as well as extra support for trusts to improve the reporting and accuracy of their ESR data.

Record numbers of cancer care staff are leaving the NHS and many are approaching retirement in the next decade.

We urgently need to see detailed workforce modelling, including plans for how the shortfall in posts will be recruited, delivered and funded alongside a credible retention plan.