NHS England London

University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

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Understanding Retention in London NHS Audiology Services

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There is a persistent workforce supply and demand gap in London NHS Audiology services, driven by vacancies, impending retirement and early career attrition of the under 30's.

Retention is a priority across the NHS (UK Government, 2025). Whilst we are aware of declining numbers of audiologists, but the specific causes are not yet fully understood. A clearer understanding of retention challenges in London NHS Audiology is essential to identify why audiologists leave and to target practical recommendations

Impact of Audiology workforce shortages

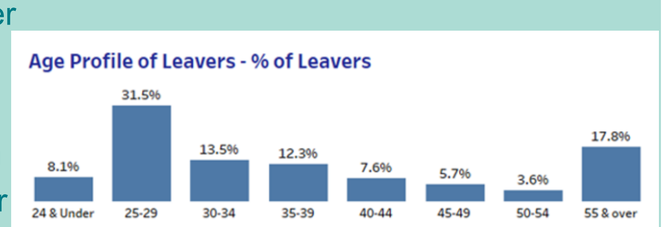
Workforce shortages in Audiology are increasingly affecting service capacity and patient access. These shortages contribute to longer waiting times, delays in diagnosis and treatment, increased workload for existing staff, and limited capacity for service development or innovation. Across England, Audiology has a high proportion of patients waiting more than six weeks for assessment.

In January 2026 44.7% exceeded the six-week wait nationally, while 47% of patients exceeded 6 week waits for DMO1 assessments in London (NHS England, 2026a; London Region Performance, Information and Regulation, 2026)

Workforce shortages remain a challenge across London Audiology Services with 38.39 WTE vacancies reported across adult and paediatric services. While there has been a small decrease in vacances (0.79 WTE) in the past year there has been a significant reduction in the use Locums and bank staff which fell from 37.6 in 2025 to 18.4 WTE this in 2026 (Source Physiological Science Power BI Dashboard, April 2026).

Workforce Data

The over 55's and under 30's represent the two largest groups of leavers of NHS London Audiology services over the past 5 years.



Age profile of Leavers of NHS Audiology April 2021-March 2025. *Source WIP, March 2025*

13.7% of Audiologists in London will reach retirement age in the next 10 years (WIP, September 2025).

Vacancy and leaver rates

There has been an 8% increase in vacancies in services over the past 5 years with 65% of services reporting a vacancy (2021), 70.5% had at least one vacancy in 2025 and 73% had at least one vacancy in 2026 (Source: Heads of Audiology service questionnaire 2021 and Physiological Sciences Power BI 2025, 2026).

Once adjusting for movement of Audiology staff within London, 88.9% of the workforce have been retained in London over the past year, whilst 3.4% of the workforce left London but remained in the NHS. (Source NHSE WIP, October 2025).

The Audiology leaver rate in London is 7.7%, compared with 6.5% across the wider healthcare science workforce in London. Of those leaving London Audiology services, 51% leave the NHS, which is lower than the healthcare science comparison group where 63%% of leavers leave the NHS (Source NHSE WIP, October 2025).

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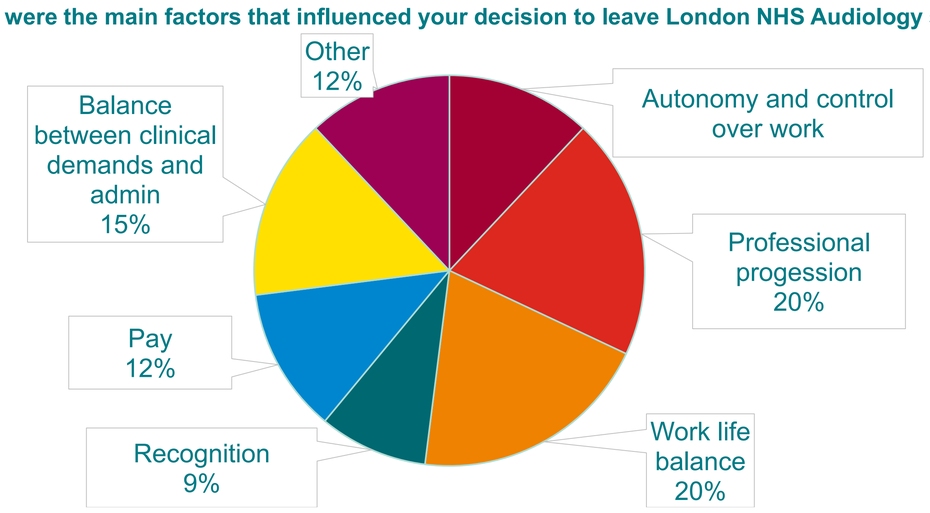
Focus groups were conducted with 25 leads from 16 London trusts as well as with staff in person and via anonymous questionnaire and NHS London Audiology Leavers. To gain both quantitative and qualitative information on what we can do to improve retention in London.

What were the main factors that influenced your decision to leave London NHS Audiology services?



Survey of NHS London Audiology leavers 2026

What staff believe will help retention

Support for newly qualified staff was highlighted as an important retention factor. Managers, current staff and former staff emphasised the value of structured training and mentorship, especially during the early stages of a career though training and mentorship was another factor that managers.

Flexibility is highly valued by the workforce. Overall, 71% of staff were satisfied with opportunities for flexible working. Flexible working was cited as a key reason some staff chose to return to the NHS.

Current and former Audiology staff groups agreed on several areas that would encourage people remain in NHS services.

Development opportunities | **Career progression** | **Work-life balance**

Positive team culture | **Fairer pay and reward**

Health and Wellbeing

Staff survey results (2025) for "other qualified scientific, technical or healthcare scientists" suggest 37% report experiencing burnout often or always because of their work.

Audiology respondents reported high levels of self reported Moderate- extreme levels of stress and burnout:

Recommendations and ongoing work

This project has highlighted several key areas that London Audiology services can focus on to help improve staff retention. These include prioritising early career support for newly qualified staff and those changing roles, effective workforce planning, supporting staff in later stages of their career, continuing to support and prioritise health and wellbeing of staff, and promoting greater recognition of staff by managers. Collectively, these priorities align with several key elements within the NHS people plan.

London Audiology service managers will meet in Mid October to review findings from the staff and leavers questionnaires and agree regional priorities and actions to support workforce retention in London.

References

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