

Cornea Activity

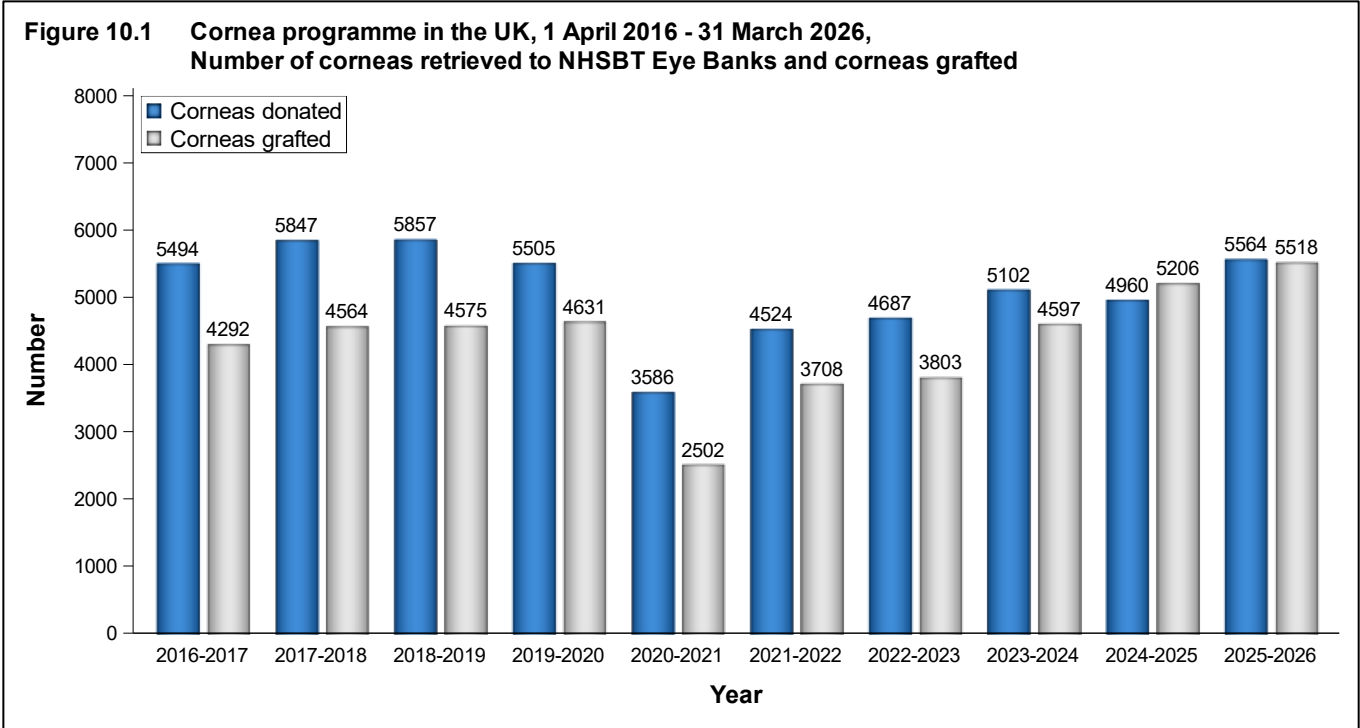
Key messages

- 5,564 corneas were retrieved to NHSBT Eye Banks
- Corneas were retrieved from 2,417 cornea-only donors and from 376 solid organ donors after brain death (50%) or after circulatory death (50%)
- The number of transplants increased by 6% to 5,518, Of those transplants, 1531 (28%) used tissue supplied by sources other than NHSBT.
- 9%, 40% and 13% of corneal transplants were for keratoconus, Fuchs endothelial dystrophy and pseudophakic bullous keratopathy patients, respectively
- Descemet membrane endothelial keratoplasty transplants are the most popular technique for corneal transplantation (41% of all transplants)

10.1 Overview

In the financial year 2025-2026, the number of corneal transplants has increased by 6% to 5,518 representing the highest number of transplants reported to NHSBT to date. Of those transplants, 1531 (28%) used tissue supplied by sources other than NHSBT. These figures are an underestimate due to delays in reporting the transplant outcome to NHSBT.

The number of corneas donated in 2025-2026 was 5,564, representing an increase of 12% compared with the previous year as shown in **Figure 10.1**. It should be noted that not all corneas donated in the UK are reported to NHSBT. Consequently, the donation data reported are not the full national data.



In 2025-2026, of 2,793 donors whose corneas were retrieved to NHSBT Eye Banks, 2,417 were cornea-only donors and 376 were cornea and solid organ donors: see **Table 10.1**. Compared to 2024-2025, the number of cornea-only donors increased by 13%, and the number of cornea and solid organ donors increased by 6%. In 2025-2026, corneas were retrieved from 188 organ donors after brain death and 188 organ donors after circulatory death.

Table 10.1 also shows the number and rate per million population (pmp) of donors whose corneas were retrieved to NHSBT Eye Banks in 2025-2026, by country and NHS region. Information for 2024-2025 is shown for comparison. No adjustments have been made for potential demographic differences in populations.

In 2025-2026, the corneal donor rate has increased across three of the four nations. England (44.5 pmp) had the highest corneal donor rate of countries in the UK. Across the NHS regions, the corneal donor rate ranged from 21.3 pmp to 75.7 pmp. This variation is largely attributed to the location of NHSBT Eye Retrieval Schemes, NHSBT Eye Banks and non-NHSBT Eye Banks (East Grinstead).

Table 10.1 Corneal donation rates per million population (pmp) in the UK, 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026 (2024 - 2025), by country/ NHS region for donors whose corneas were retrieved to NHSBT Eye Banks								
Country of residence/ NHS region	Cornea-only		Solid organ and cornea		TOTAL		TOTAL pmp	
North East and Yorkshire	276	(293)	44	(35)	320	(328)	37.9	(38.8)
North West	414	(456)	31	(27)	445	(483)	57.6	(62.5)
Midlands	497	(320)	54	(66)	551	(386)	48.9	(34.3)
East of England	456	(288)	42	(40)	498	(328)	75.7	(49.8)
London	150	(149)	48	(51)	198	(200)	21.7	(21.9)
South East	154	(145)	51	(67)	205	(212)	21.3	(22.0)
South West	340	(374)	55	(44)	395	(418)	66.7	(70.6)
England	2287	(2025)	325	(330)	2612	(2355)	44.5	(40.1)
Isle of Man	0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	0.0	(0.0)
Channel Islands	0	(0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	0.0	(0.0)
Wales	89	(69)	22	(6)	111	(75)	34.5	(23.3)
Scotland	35	(28)	19	(13)	54	(41)	9.6	(7.3)
Northern Ireland	6	(10)	10	(7)	16	(17)	8.2	(8.7)
TOTAL	2417	(2132)	376	(356)	2793	(2488)	40.2	(35.8)

10.2 NHSBT Eye Bank activity

NHSBT Eye Bank activity levels for Filton (Bristol) and David Lucas (in Liverpool) Eye Banks are shown in **Table 10.2**. In 2025-2026, a total of 5,564 corneas were retrieved to NHSBT, of which 4,405 (79%) were subsequently issued for transplantation. In some instances, corneas are deemed to be unsuitable for transplantation and are not issued by the Eye Bank.

Table 10.2 Corneas retrieved into NHSBT Eye Banks, by year 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026 (2024-2025)								
Eye bank	Total retrieved		Number issued ¹		% issued		Difference between number retrieved and issued	
Filton	2840	(2437)	2253	(1826)	79	(75)	587	(611)
David Lucas	2724	(2523)	2152	(1961)	79	(78)	572	(562)
Total	5564	(4960)	4405	(3787)	79	(76)	1159	(1173)
¹ Number issued of those retrieved in each year								

10.3 Transplants

Corneal transplant activity in the UK by country of residence and NHS regions for the years 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 is detailed in **Table 10.3**. Corneas were supplied by NHSBT and non-NHSBT Eye Banks for corneal transplants in the UK. No adjustments have been made for potential demographic differences in populations.

The overall transplant rate was 74.9 pmp in 2024-2025 which increased to 79.4 pmp in 2025-2026. Transplant rates increased in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. England had the highest transplant rate in the UK: 84.3 pmp, and this ranged from 59.7 pmp to 107.8 pmp across the NHS regions.

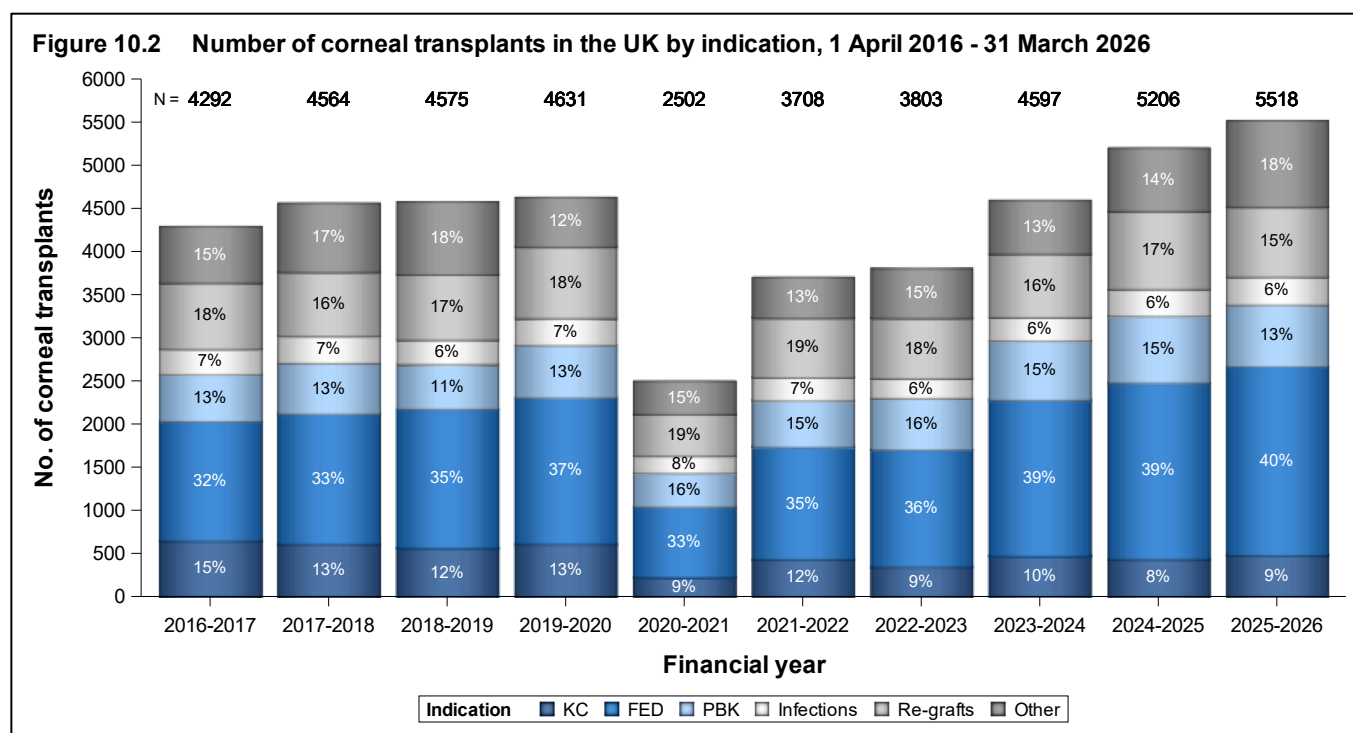


Table 10.3 Cornea transplants performed per million population (pmp) in the UK, 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2026, by country/NHS region

Country of residence/ NHS region	Number of transplants (pmp)			
	2024-2025		2025-2026	
North East and Yorkshire	657	(77.8)	788	(93.3)
North West	671	(86.8)	686	(88.7)
Midlands	685	(60.8)	787	(69.8)
East of England	264	(40.1)	393	(59.7)
London	1032	(113.2)	919	(100.8)
South East	752	(78.0)	741	(76.9)
South West	637	(107.6)	664	(112.2)
England	4698	(80.0)	4978	(84.8)
Isle of Man	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)
Channel Islands	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)
Wales	141	(43.8)	144	(44.7)
Scotland	295	(52.7)	302	(53.9)
Northern Ireland	71	(36.2)	94	(48.0)
TOTAL¹	5206	(74.9)	5518	(79.4)

¹ Includes 1 UK recipient where the postcode was unspecified

Figure 10.2 shows the number of corneal transplants in the UK by indication for transplant from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2026. For corneas transplanted in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026, a further breakdown by indication is shown in **Table 10.4**.



The most common indication for transplantation is FED, representing 40% of corneal transplants in 2025-2026, as shown in **Table 10.4**. A large number of transplants defined as "not reported" are attributable to delays in entering the transplant record form in the last financial year.

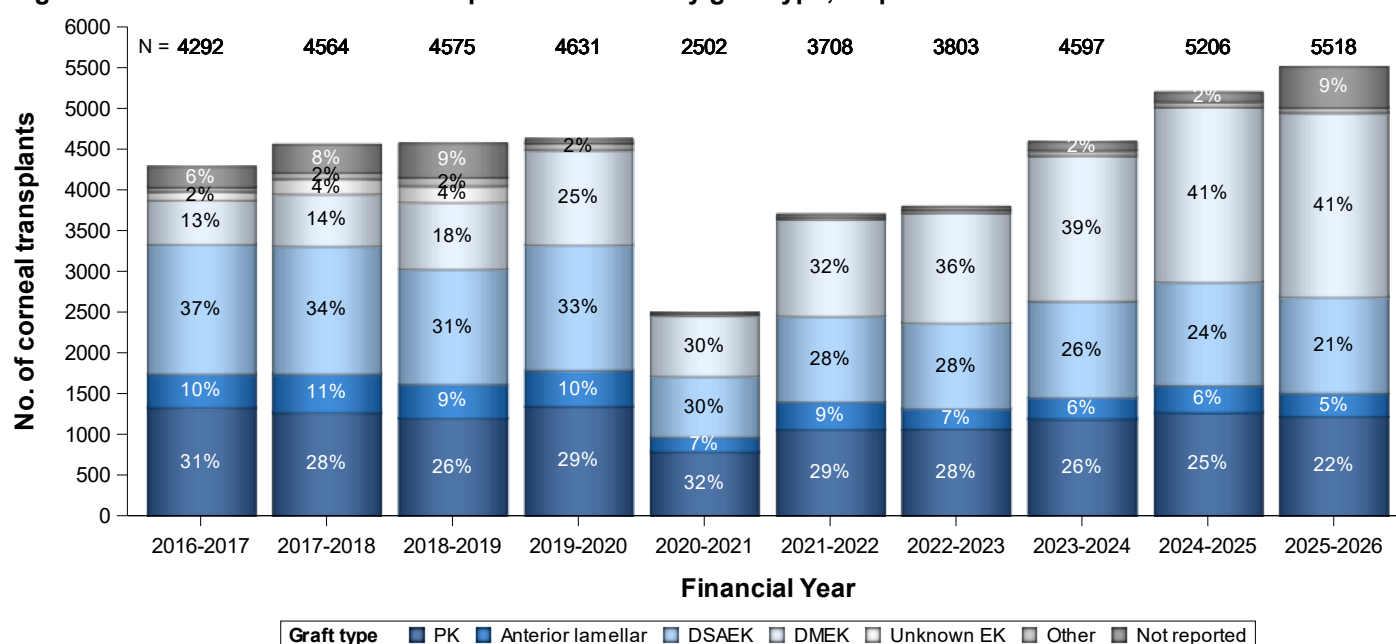
Table 10.4 Corneal transplants in the UK by indication and financial year, 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2026				
Indication for transplant	2024 - 2025		2025 - 2026	
	N	%	N	%
Keratoconus (KC)	436	8.4	486	8.8
Fuchs endothelial dystrophy (FED)	2049	39.4	2186	39.6
Pseudophakic bullous keratopathy (PBK)	771	14.8	719	13.0
Infections	311	6.0	321	5.8
Re-grafts	906	17.4	807	14.6
Other (listed below)	733	14.1	999	18.1
Ectasias	18	0.3	19	0.3
Dystrophies	79	1.5	72	1.3
Previous ocular surgery	151	2.9	133	2.4
Injury	64	1.2	43	0.8
Ulcerative keratitis	58	1.1	51	0.9
Opacification	121	2.3	91	1.6
Miscellaneous	179	3.4	142	2.6
Not reported	63	1.2	448	8.1
Total	5206	100.0	5518	100.0

Figure 10.3 shows the number of corneal transplants in the UK by graft type from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2026. Over the last 10 years, the proportion of penetrating keratoplasty (PK) grafts has reduced by nearly a third. Descemet Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty (DMEK) transplants are now the most popular technique for corneal transplantation.

The type of EK graft, Descemet Stripping Automated EK (DSAEK) and DMEK transplants, were first collected as free text on the form. This meant that all EK transplants were often reported as EK unknown. In April 2019, the form changed so that 'EK unknown' was no longer specified.

Between January 2014 and March 2019, unknown EK graft types have been imputed such that grafts by surgeons that have never reported a DMEK transplant are assumed to be Descemet Stripping Automated EK (DSAEK) transplants and all transplants prior to the first reported DMEK are considered DSAEK transplants. A further breakdown by graft type for corneas transplanted in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 is shown in **Table 10.5**.

Figure 10.3 Number of corneal transplants in the UK by graft type, 1 April 2016 - 31 March 2026



Between April 2016 to March 2019, unknown EK grafts have been imputed such that historic grafts and grafts by surgeons that have never reported a DMEK transplant are assumed to be DSAEK transplants

In 2025-2026, 22% of grafts were DSAEK and 41% were DMEK grafts. PK grafts are still a popular choice for corneal transplantation accounting for 22% of all transplants in 2025-2026. A large number of "not reported" graft types are attributable to delays in entering the transplant record form in the last financial year.

Table 10.5 Corneal transplants in the UK by graft type and financial year, 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2026

Graft type	2024 - 2025		2025 - 2026	
	N	%	N	%
PK	1276	24.5	1225	22.2
Anterior lamellar	331	6.4	285	5.2
DSAEK	1268	24.4	1185	21.5
DMEK	2149	41.3	2257	40.9
Other	66	1.3	68	1.2
Not reported	116	2.2	498	9.0
All grafts	5206	100.0	5518	100.0

10.4 Demographic characteristics

The age, sex and ethnicity of cornea donors and transplant recipients are shown in **Table 10.6**.

Table 10.6 Demographic characteristics of donors whose corneas were retrieved to NHSBT Eye Banks and transplant recipients in the UK, 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026							
		Cornea-only donors		Solid organ and cornea donors		Transplant recipients	
		N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Age	0-17	4	(0)	3	(1)	30	(1)
	18-34	16	(1)	23	(6)	320	(6)
	35-49	99	(4)	68	(18)	468	(8)
	50-59	237	(10)	88	(23)	546	(10)
	60-69	492	(20)	104	(28)	1080	(20)
	70-79	931	(39)	86	(23)	1804	(33)
	80+	638	(26)	4	(1)	1270	(23)
	Mean (SD)	71	(11)	58	(14)	67	(16)
Sex	Male	1370	(57)	208	(55)	2717	(49)
	Female	1047	(43)	168	(45)	2801	(51)
Ethnicity	White	49	(94)	348	(96)	4033	(89)
	Asian	3	(6)	9	(2)	318	(7)
	Black	0	0	4	(1)	161	(4)
	Other	0	0	2	(1)	41	(1)
	Not reported	2365	-	13	-	965	-
TOTAL		2417	100.0	376	100.0	5518	100.0