

RCN

**Employment
Survey 2023**



Royal College
of Nursing
Scotland



Scotland Summary

Background

This briefing provides a summary of the views of RCN members in Scotland and paints a detailed picture of members' professional lives across the NHS and the independent health and social care sector.

The data comes from RCN members who took part in the RCN Employment Survey which was undertaken during autumn 2023. The survey received, 1,802 responses from registered nurses, nursing support workers and nursing students in Scotland, representing 16% of the total UK wide responses.

This survey is the latest in a long-running series undertaken with RCN members across the UK. Over the years, many of the survey questions have remained consistent, which allows us to compare trends over time. The key findings from across the UK can be found [here](#).

Summary of findings

Intention to leave

1

Retention and recruitment of nursing staff is a significant challenge for Scotland's health and social care services with around 3,000 registered nurse vacancies in NHS Scotland alone.

2

The survey shows a worrying proportion of nursing staff are considering or planning to leave their roles, with almost half of respondents (46%) actively planning or thinking about leaving their jobs and a further 11% intending to retire.

3

Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents who are thinking about leaving their current job gave feeling undervalued as the key reason, closely followed by feeling under too much pressure (64%) and concerns about staffing levels (62%).

4

Out of those who work excess hours, over half (54%) report that these hours are unpaid.



"I have worked within the NHS for 8 years. I am leaving the NHS permanently to do full time agency. Better work life balance, more pay and less responsibility in terms of being made to be in charge."

Staff nurse, NHS hospital unit, Scotland



Appropriateness of pay

1

Less than a quarter of respondents (22%) think their pay is appropriate given their role and responsibilities, a fall of over 20 percentage points from 43% since 2015.



“I really enjoy my job and find it rewarding but there is a lot of pressure put on newly qualified nurses to be like junior doctors, which is stressful and unfair as the pay does not reflect this.”

Clinical nurse specialist, NHS outpatients, Scotland



Working hours

1

Only 40% of respondents are happy with their working hours.

2

Levels of satisfaction over the length of shifts worked has fallen from 51% in 2015 to 35% in 2023.

3

Increasing workloads are impacting on the number of hours worked. Almost three quarters (73%) of nursing staff are working in excess of their contracted hours every week. This compares to 65% working additional hours every week in 2015.

4

17% of respondents said they were working beyond contracted hours every shift, 34% reported this was several times a week.

5

Just one in three (30%) of respondents feel able to balance work and home lives.



“I enjoy aspects of my job as a health visitor, but I regularly work after my finishing time to ensure my work is up to date, however, this has an implication on my work-life balance and my family. I am considering leaving nursing all together to find a job I can leave on time and not have to worry about work.”

Health visitor, Scotland



Impact of work intensification

- 1 The number of nursing staff who feel under too much pressure at work has increased from 66% in 2015 to 70% in 2023 but is down from a high of 72% in 2021.
- 2 66% of respondents report that they are too busy to provide the level of care they would like and 58% reported that too much time is spent on non-nursing duties.
- 3 Only four in 10 of respondents reported completing their mandatory training within working time.



“Staffing numbers are so unsafe. Wrong skill mix, lack of staff and level of patient acuity is all wrong. I am worried someone will be harmed or severely injured as we are unable to cope with the demand of care.”

Health care assistant, NHS hospital, Scotland



Feelings about nursing as a career

How respondents feel about nursing as a career is concerning.

- 1 The number who would describe nursing is a rewarding career has slipped from a high of 71% in 2019 to 59% in 2023.
- 2 However, the number agreeing with the statement ‘most days I am enthusiastic about my job’ is recovering from a low of 45% in 2021, to 50% in 2023.



“Nursing is a very rewarding career but work-life balance can be very difficult due to long shifts. The pay does not reflect the amount of responsibility and years studying. Some roles in health and social care and private sectors can have better pay, conditions and bonuses which attract nurses. No nurse should ever have to miss meals at work.”

Staff nurse, NHS hospital, Scotland





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The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

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