

## RCN Briefing: Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce Report

The Scottish government's Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce, led by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, was established in 2023 in response to RCN campaigning on safe staffing and fair pay.

The Taskforce brought together key stakeholders to develop a series of recommended actions to improve retention of experienced staff; attract new nurses and expand routes into nursing; improve workplace culture and environments; increase staff wellbeing; and improve access to education and development. RCN Scotland chaired two of the Taskforce subgroups and was represented on the others.

### Taskforce report

Last year we published [Scotland's Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce – Our Priorities for Action](#), which set out the actions we wanted to see included in the Taskforce recommendations. While not everything we called for has been included, we influenced all the Taskforce recommended actions and the majority of these priorities were ultimately reflected in the final report.

The Taskforce report [Delivering Together for a Stronger Nursing and Midwifery Workforce](#) contains 44 recommended actions. They include actions designed to ensure nursing staff receive their breaks, improve access to flexible working and improve workplace culture, with an emphasis on psychological safety and compassionate leadership.

The Scottish government has also committed to working with partners to develop alternative nursing degree models (including blended and distance learning) and to developing alternative entry routes in the profession (including part time, earn as you learn and apprenticeship models).

Other commitments include a review of the predicted absence allowance to ensure it reflects non-clinical aspects of nursing and realistic levels of absence. We have been calling for this to be increased for some time.

This is just a snapshot of the recommended actions. Taken as a whole, these recommendations are ambitious and, if implemented well, will help develop a sustainable nursing workforce for the future.

### Next steps

We are clear that publication of the Taskforce recommendations is just the first step. Now the focus must be on implementing these actions in a sustainable and meaningful way. These are ambitious plans and implementation will take time and investment. The Scottish government has agreed to form an implementation group to oversee this work, including developing a detailed workplan with timescales and a financial framework, and we look forward to playing a key role on this group.

The Taskforce report is the culmination of two years of collaborative working and we now have a clear set of recommendations that we will use to hold the Scottish government to account to deliver positive change and meet its own aspiration of making Scotland the best place for nurses and midwives to work.

We ask MSPs to support our calls for the Scottish government to fund implementation of the Taskforce recommendations and to scrutinise the progress made by Scottish government and employers in delivering these. If the Taskforce recommendations are not implemented, the current crisis in the nursing workforce will only worsen.

## Listening project

The work of the Taskforce was informed by a Listening Project which gave current nursing staff across Scotland the opportunity to share their experiences about their working conditions. The contributions received highlight the need for the Taskforce to deliver meaningful change for the profession. Key messages received from nursing staff include:

- Staff love their job but feel that the system they are working within and the pressure they are under is making it harder to feel like that. They want to enjoy their role again and encourage others into the career.
- Staff want to be able to manage their own wellbeing with supports in place but do not appreciate when self-care initiatives are put in place rather than fixing challenging working environments.
- Staff want to be able to have more flexibility to match the job with their personal circumstances at that time (e.g., caring responsibilities, commuting, physical ability).
- Many staff were positive about career development, but this was not always available consistently or universally, especially in more rural areas. Finding time to undertake both mandatory and developmental training is difficult and inconsistent with other job families.
- Staff want to be able to deliver good quality care which involves spending sufficient time with patients. However, inefficient IT systems and often multiple data input requirements are time consuming and detract from this and can often lead to duplication of work.
- Staff do not feel safe when moved to cover staffing gaps in an area they are not familiar with.

## Update on fair pay for nursing

The scope of the Taskforce did not include pay, terms and conditions, or the non-pay aspects of the 2023 Agenda for Change pay settlement, because these are considered through separate processes. However, we thought it would be useful to provide an update on these issues from an RCN Scotland perspective.

### *Fair pay*

- Despite making it clear to the Scottish government that we expect Agenda for Change pay negotiations for 2025-26 to commence in a timely fashion, the length of time it is taking to enter negotiations is unacceptable. Our members expect negotiations to be concluded in time for the 1 April 2025. We will continue to push for future pay awards to be restorative and commensurate with the demands of the nursing role and the level of education required and the joint pay claim submitted by the health trade unions in January reflects those aims.
- The Scottish government must also prioritise improvements to the pay, terms and conditions for nursing staff employed within the social care sector. This must be a key focus for Scottish government's revised approach to tackling the challenges facing social care. We support the establishment of a sectoral bargaining system and for nursing staff to have pay, terms and conditions at least equal to equivalent roles in the NHS.
- GP nursing staff play an essential role in delivering NHS services, but many of them still are not receiving the fair pay they deserve. We would expect all general practice employers who receive Scottish government funding for an annual pay increase for directly-employed GP nursing staff to implement the increases each year. Our survey of GP directly-employed nursing staff tells us that for a significant proportion this is not happening.

### *Agenda for change reform*

- Members are receiving mixed messages currently about the implementation of the shorter working week, and we are waiting for clarity from the Scottish government on next steps towards its commitment to a 36-hour week by April 2026.
- We are also concerned about the pace of the Review of Band 5 nursing roles. While the numbers applying to the Band 5 review are increasing, progress on evaluating submissions and reaching outcomes is slow. The Scottish government should make clear that it expects all boards to share information about the Band 5 nursing roles review with their staff to encourage and support participation. As part of our commitment to supporting members taking part in the review, we have launched a roadshow programme across Scotland.