

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) briefing: Fair Pay for Nursing

Today, the RCN has launched its campaign – **Fair Pay for Nursing** – calling for a pay rise of 12.5% for all nursing staff in the NHS as an important step towards achieving fair pay for nursing staff across the country.

UK Government commitment to a pay rise will mean funds can be released through devolved funding arrangements, allowing all parts of the UK to move forward on NHS pay.

An early, fair and meaningful pay rise

Nursing is critical to the health and wellbeing of the country, and nursing staff have been crucial to the UK's pandemic response, with thousands of retired professionals and students joining current staff in stepping forward in the fight against COVID-19. However, prior to the pandemic, there was an estimated 50,000 registered nursing vacancies in the NHS across the UK. This is the largest healthcare workforce shortage in the country.

The Fair Pay for Nursing campaign is about much more than our response to the pandemic. It is about recognising the complexity of skill, responsibility and expertise demonstrated every day, by nursing support workers, nursing associates, registered nurses and all members of the profession. It is about making sure that the tens of thousands of vacant roles are filled so that our safety critical profession can reach safe staffing levels and keep patients safe.

Over a third of nurses are over the age of 50 meaning that in the next decade, we will see a large portion of our workforce beginning to retire.¹ A recent survey of 42,000 RCN members showed a worrying rise in those reporting that they are considering leaving the profession, with 61% of members citing pay, and almost half citing low staffing levels as a key factor. Nearly three quarters (73%) said higher pay would make them feel more valued.²

While we are encouraged to see a rise in application and acceptances this year to nursing degree courses across the UK, we are still in the middle of a severe workforce shortage. The last decade has seen pay for nursing staff shrink, not keeping pace with living costs. A succession of pay freezes or meagre, below-inflation awards since 2010 mean the marginal increase in their earnings over the course of a decade has been dwarfed by the rise in the cost of living in that period, leaving many struggling financially and seeing their net pay and/or disposable income decrease. Governments across the UK must tackle the existing workforce shortage and ensure that the nursing profession is attractive, well-paid and meaningfully supported. That is how to ensure all NHS and care services are equipped to provide safe and effective care for all patients, now and in the future.

Agenda for Change

Agenda for Change is the name given to the terms, conditions and pay scales for staff working in the NHS, excepting doctors, dentists and certain senior managers.

Usually, NHS pay is determined through the NHS Pay Review Body (PRB) process, which makes recommendations after taking evidence from trade unions, employers and governments.

¹ <https://www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-accounts/registration-statistics/>

² <https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/building-a-better-future-for-nursing>

In 2018 a three year pay deal that included reform to the pay structure was agreed. In Northern Ireland only two years (2019-2021) of this pay award and reforms were implemented, and this only occurred after nurses, and other health care staff, took industrial action. This comes to an end in March 2021. In July, the RCN, along with the other thirteen health unions, wrote to the Prime Minister and Chancellor, calling for the next pay round to be brought forward. As well as committing to immediate discussions on pay and delivering a deal that reaches members' pockets before 2021, we also called for Government to recognise the importance of tackling vacancies across the NHS.

We need your support

The RCN represents 450,000 members working across health and care – with thousands of members per constituency, we are asking Members of Parliament to stand with nursing staff in their local community and publicly support our call for an early and meaningful pay rise.

In order for the Government to meet its commitment of 50,000 more nurses in England by the end of this Parliament, and to tackle the UK wide nursing workforce shortage, urgent action is needed to attract and retain many more nursing staff. Following years of real-terms losses, and the largest health crisis the nation has seen in decades, now is the time for nursing staff to receive this meaningful pay rise that they deserve.

We are calling on the UK Government to:

- Commit to immediate discussions on pay
- Recognise the importance of tackling vacancies across the NHS
- Deliver a deal that reaches members' pockets before 2021, helping to retain staff;
- Integrate an NHS pay deal into plans to boost local economies
- Guarantee additional funding for employers and to cover meaningful pay increases - with the flow-through to devolved funding arrangements, allowing all parts of the UK to move forward on NHS pay.

In the coming weeks, our members will be communicating with you, asking for you to support them by writing to the Government, showing your support on social media or meeting with them to discuss our campaign.

What next?

Updates to the campaign and activity from members from across the country will be shared on @RCN digital channels and on our website. You can also follow the campaign on social media through #FairPayForNursing

About the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world. For further information about the campaign or issues critical to nursing staff in your constituency please contact Beth Knight-Yamamoto, Public Affairs Manager, at Beth.Knight-Yamamoto@rcn.org.uk