

NHS Pay Review Body – 2024/2025 pay round

Royal College of Nursing Wales (RCN Wales) evidence

1. Introduction

1.1 The Royal College of Nursing has provided evidence to the Pay Review Body (PRB) relating to the UK-wide position. This paper will provide supporting evidence relating specifically to Wales.

1.2 Nursing needs to be an attractive career to ensure a sustainable workforce. A substantial increase in nursing staff is needed to ensure the delivery of high-quality patient care in Wales. Put simply, it takes a higher number of nursing staff with a greater level of knowledge and skill to care for a person with a broken hip if they are also physically frail, living with dementia, diabetes, a heart condition, and respiratory illness; even more so if this person is being cared for at home.

1.5 In respect of 2024-25, RCN Wales again requests a substantial and an above

good foundations to ensuring that nurses feel valued and that they stay in the profession.¹

2.4 To ensure that nursing remains an attractive career, and to keep the nursing workforce wanting to provide care within the NHS, the nursing workforce deserve a fair and meaningful pay rise. This employment survey was of RCN members which was undertaken in 2023. The survey has so far received 847 Welsh responses from registered nurses, health care support workers and students working across all areas of health and social care.

its first and only Welsh Health Circular to date. This focused exclusively on a new control framework to reduce avoidable agency deployment. There is no sign of “priority” being given to the issues around additional hours and pay, but these will be critical to reducing avoidable agency spend. NHS Wales will continue to rely on agencies until it can compete with them for staff.

4.6 A related issue is that of work-life balance. In its 2023 agreement with RCN Wales members, the Welsh government committed to reduce last-minute shift changes by driving through rostering best practice including rosters issued 12 weeks in advance and incentivising the early filling of rota gaps. A working group was to be established in September 2023 and report by February 2024, with implementation to be completed by the end of 2024. The February 2024 update to the Welsh Partnership Forum regarding the 2023 agreement did not address these important commitments.

4.7 It is known that nurses often leave the NHS for agency working due to the ability to choose their own hours and for higher pay. A fair and meaningful pay rise would reduce the attractiveness of agency working and save public money.

5. Overtime

5.1 The Welsh government's agreement with RCN Wales members in 2023 included a welcome acknowledgement of the fact of, and the unfair nature of, NHS staff working additional hours that are not remunerated. The offer included a commitment to work with NHS Employers to issue a pay letter by end of September 2023 to ensure that nurses are paid properly for the hours they work including their breaks and shift over runs in line with national agreed terms and conditions. At time of writing, this letter has not been issued. Neither has there been an update on promised work to ensure a robust system for logging and claiming additional hours is in place by April 2024.

5.2 In the same agreement, the Welsh government committed to establish a working group to report by Autumn 2023 on the feasibility of moving to a 36-hour working week without loss of earnings. This has been delayed to the end of March 2024, which previously was the deadline for defining a timeline to move to a 36-hour week. This commitment was a very significant part of the agreement RCN Wales members accepted in September 2023. A failure to deliver it will lead to a

show high burnout levels, and to report low or deteriorating quality of care on their wards and hospitals.¹³

6.2 The table below shows the annual sickness absence rate of nursing, midwifery and health visiting between 2010-2022, which increased from 6% in 2010 to 8.5% in 2022 (the latest complete year for which data is available). The average sickness rate for January-September 2023 is 7.3%.¹⁴

straight from a pandemic, the effects of which are still felt, to a crisis in waiting times.

7.3 Not only are nurses still being affected by the impact of the pandemic, but the fact that COVID-19 has not gone away – it remains endemic – means that it is still actively affecting nurses.

8. Agenda for Change

8.1 In its offer to RCN Wales members dated 18 July 2023 the Welsh government acknowledged concerns that the Agenda for Change (AfC) pay structure is not working as it should for RCN Wales members. It committed to reviewing the national role profiles and developing a national plan and methodology to ensure that day to day expectations fit with the pay band of individuals. To date, this has not happened.

8.2 In the same offer to RCN Wales members dated 18 July 2023, the Welsh government made a commitment that NHS Employers would set up a working group to plan how job descriptions can be reviewed every three years, and explore a potential mechanism to identify priority areas. The working group's first progress report was due by the end of 2023, via the Partnership Agreement Hub. To date, this has not happened either.

8.3 Job evaluation is a key component of the AfC pay structure. The basis of the claim that AfC

9. Recruitment and Retention Premia

9.1 Recruitment and retention premia where market pressures arise. As part of its negotiations with the Welsh Government in 2023, RCN Wales drew attention to the fact that retention premia are not currently being used in nursing. In addition, the PRB can recommend national recruitment and retention premia for particular groups of staff where there are national recruitment and retention pressures.

9.2 Above, RCN Wales has demonstrated the level of staffing crisis that exists in the NHS. In addition to an appropriate pay award, RCN Wales calls on the PRB to recommend national recruitment and retention premia for the nursing workforce.

9.3 RCN Wales considers this the only means of stability for the nursing profession. Without premia of this nature, the health and social care workforce will continue to haemorrhage staff and further still, compromise patient safety.

9.4 The cumulative impact of decade-long wage stagnation, combined with soaring cost of living pressures, point to the need for a significant pay uplift as part of an overall package of measures to address the workforce crisis.

9.5 The RCN calls on the PRB to recommend an increase: so that nursing and other NHS staff can cope with rising and rapidly fluctuating costs which may continue to increase significantly over the pay year; to begin restoration of 'lost ground' against the rises in the cost of living as part of an overall commitment to pay restoration with a clear timetable/timescale; and to absorb the impact of increases to pension contributions.

10. Economic challenges

10.1 The RCN Employment survey (2023) found that 54% of Welsh respondents reported that their earnings represent about or more than half of the household income, demonstrating the importance of nursing staff pay in supporting their household.

10.2 Many RCN Wales members complained that, as one member put it, “responsibilities, expectations and accountability [are not] reflected in pay”, with working above band being a common experience.

10.3 Members said that they would be able to get a less stressful job with lower qualification requirements. In one member’s words, they have

with another member saying that they

10.4 HCSW are a valuable part of the nursing team, providing support and care for patients and are crucial for ensuring safe and effective care, and yet their pay does not reflect this.

10.5 There is a clear need to financially support the nursing workforce in Wales. Not only is the NHS the largest employer in Wales, but the nursing workforce represents over a third of all those employed by NHS Wales. A consequence of a pay rise for the nursing workforce would be to greatly improve the financial situation of families and communities across Wales.

10.6 The annual RPI inflation rate was 4.9% in January 2024¹⁶, and CPIH increased from 0.9% in January 2021 to 4.2% in January 2024¹⁷. Nursing staff are expectant of an above inflation pay award to help manage rising cost of living.

10.7 The cost-of-living crisis is having a widespread impact on RCN members. One RCN Wales member, for example, said that although they were “working hard”, that they would as their income is “not enough to pay my bills”. Another member said that they were “unable to meet daily expenses” as “more than half [of their] salary goes for rent, Tax and other bills”. And another member said that their income was

¹⁶ [Consumer price inflation, UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹⁷ [CPIH ANNUAL RATE 00: ALL ITEMS 2015=100 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁸ RCN Wales members from 2023 RCN Employment Survey

11. Conclusion

11.1 RCN Wales again requests a substantial and an above inflation pay rise for nursing in 2024-25 that delivers pay justice to one of the lowest paid professions in the public sector and is predominantly female.

11.2 RCN Wales members expect to see all the Welsh government's commitments from the July 2023 offer delivered. The significance of that offer, which RCN Wales members accepted in good faith in September 2023, cannot be overstated. The offer ended the first ever period of industrial action by Royal College of Nursing members on the island of Great Britain. If the promises therein are not delivered, RCN Wales members will question the Welsh government's commitment to any future offer, to the nursing workforce, and to delivering safe and effective patient care.

11.3 RCN Wales once again calls for immediate national nursing Recruitment and Retention Premiums to address the chronic and increasing nursing workforce shortages faced in Wales and across the UK in all NHS areas and specialities.

11.4 RCN Wales calls on the PRB to make recommendations regarding career progression for nursing (such as automatic progression) and to confirm that Agenda for Change in 2024 does not accurately reflect the relative job weight of the realities, complexities, and development trajectories of nursing as a modern graduate profession, best to enable the recruitment, retention and motivation of nurses in the short and medium term.

11.5 The nursing workforce in Wales is tired, and feels undervalued, under-pressure and burnt

supported. This should be done by implementing the National Retention Plan in full and increasing financially sustainable routes into nursing education.

11.8 The PRB must make recommendations that will support the recruitment and retention of nursing staff. In addition to an initial restorative pay award, RCN Wales calls on the PRB to recommend immediate measures to implement national Retention Premia Payments and Recruitment Premia Payments for the nursing workforce as a matter of urgency to address the ever-worsening workforce crisis. To understand the extent to which nursing staff are under pressure, indicators of population need and workforce pressure such as vacancy rates, agency spend, and workload pressure should be considered.

Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol Cymru – Royal College of Nursing Wales

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over half a million members, including nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, with around 30,500 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing.

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

February 2024

Publication code: 011 501