



Royal College  
of Nursing  
Scotland

# **RCN Scotland Employment Survey Briefing**

## Background

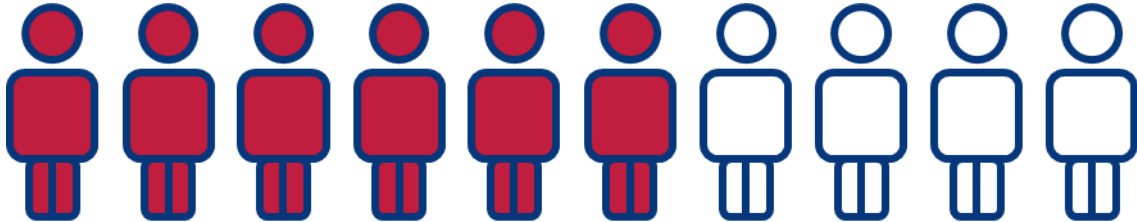
This report provides a summary of the views of RCN members nearly two years into the pandemic. These findings paint a detailed picture of members' professional lives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data comes from RCN members in Scotland who took part in the 2021 RCN Employment Survey, published at the end of December 2021. From Scotland, 1,293 responses were received, representing 13.5% of the total UK wide responses, including members working for NHS Health Boards, social care, general practice, agencies and education settings.

The fieldwork for the survey was carried out in October 2021, with a representative sample of RCN members approached to complete the survey. It was also open to other RCN members to respond.

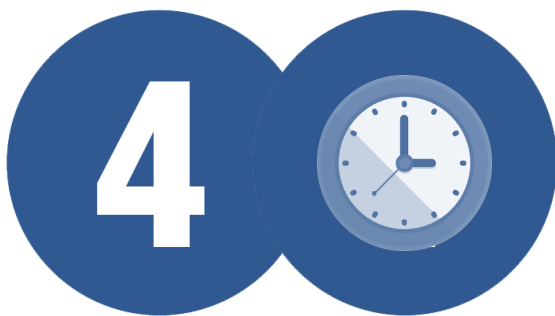
The key findings from responses across the UK can be found [here](#). Below is a summary of the views of Scottish members of the RCN. Representative comments submitted by provided by Scottish members are included.

## Key findings



**6 out of 10 nursing staff in Scotland  
are considering or planning to leave their jobs**

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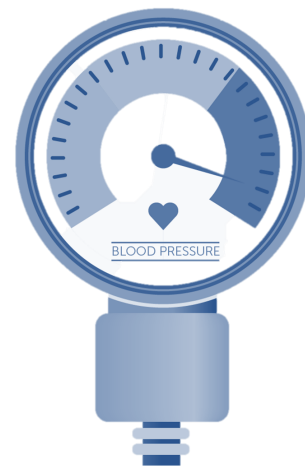


**Nearly 40% of nursing staff  
are working beyond their  
contracted hours most shifts**

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**67% are too busy  
to provide the level  
of care they would like**



**72% are under too much  
pressure at work**

## Intention to leave

- The survey shows a worrying proportion of nursing staff are considering or planning to leave their roles. With over 5,000 nursing and midwifery posts unfilled in the NHS alone, it is vital that Scotland is able to retain staff.
- Over 6 in 10 (61%) of nursing staff in Scotland are thinking about leaving their current post (including planning for retirement).
- From this figure, 41% said they are considering leaving their job while 20% are actively planning on leaving.
- In comparison, the RCN's UK wide Pay and Working Conditions survey undertaken in the beginning of the pandemic, found that 36% of respondents were thinking about leaving that year.
- Among those thinking about or planning leaving, 75% say this is because they feel undervalued, 64% say they feel too much pressure, 64% report feeling exhausted, 65% cite staffing levels are too low and 54% report levels of pay are too low as one of the main reasons for considering or planning to leave.

*"Have had a long career and seen many changes and challenges but at this point in time morale is the lowest I've ever seen it. I have mostly enjoyed my career and been proud of my work but now have been left feeling stressed, unappreciated and vulnerable and my confidence has taken a massive hit so I've made the decision to take early retirement."*

*Staff nurse, NHS hospital, Scotland*

*"Nurses have always been underpaid. With the pandemic, things have just gone worse. At the end of the day, after all that hard work and work stress, when you look at the salary, there is just disappointment."*

*Staff nurse, acute and urgent setting, Scotland*



## Working beyond contracted hours

- Long working hours have been a problem for the nursing profession across all parts of health and social care. The latest survey shows that in Scotland, nearly three quarters (73%) report regularly working beyond their contracted hours.
- 37% report working in excess of their contracted hours several times a week, 19% once a week, 17% less than once a week.
- Out of those who work excess hours, 12% work 7-10 additional hours a week, 37% work 3-6 additional hours a week.
- 54% are not paid for their additional hours.

*“Your salary calculation is based on a 37.5 hr week. I cannot remember the last time I worked less than 50hrs a week, in charge of 300+ staff during the worst staffing crisis I’ve ever known... you cannot work 37.5hrs and support staff properly. Absolutely no work/life balance and strain on personal life too. Definitely not worth the salary.”*  
Senior Nurse, NHS hospital, Scotland



## Taking annual Leave

- Workload and service pressures are impacting on the ability for staff to take annual leave, with only two thirds 64% able to take their full entitlement this year.
- Some staff have not yet requested their full entitlement (16%) while 18% report being unable to take full annual leave or have worked while on leave.

*“Only had one week holiday in past year due to pandemic and did not get paid for loss of holidays. And this was after I had worked my fingers off covering for staff who were off sick and caring for residents who were at end of life.”*  
Staff nurse, Independent nursing home, Scotland



## Impact of work intensification

- Further findings show that work intensification is leading to nursing staff feeling overworked.
- 72% of Scottish nursing staff report they are under too much pressure at work.
- While 67% said they are too busy to provide the level of care they would like.

*“Our area is overwhelmed and unable to provide safe and high standard of care to our patients. Queues of patients out the door. I have always enjoyed my job and found it rewarding. It feels like we are sinking in quick-sand, with no way out.”*

*Advanced nurse practitioner, NHS hospital, Scotland*



*“Main issues are due to being constantly short staffed. Also I feel that nursing is not valued as a profession by a significant number of the public and politicians who don’t understand the pressures experienced by nurses.”*

*Staff nurse, NHS hospital, Scotland*

## Data tables

Some percentage totals in these tables do not add up to 100% due to rounding. Not all respondents provided answers to all questions, meaning the total numbers for findings in these tables may differ.

**Table 1: Intention to leave**

I am not considering leaving my job	I'm thinking about leaving my job	I'm actively planning to leave my job	Don't know/ unsure
26.0%	41.2%	19.6%	13.2%

**Table 2: Reasons for considering or planning to leave**

Feeling undervalued	75.4%
Too much pressure	64.4%
Feeling exhausted	63.9%
Staffing levels are too low	64.7%
Levels of pay are too low	53.8%
Can't give level of care to standard I would like	54.5%
Not enough managerial support	49.4%
My own stress levels	43.1%
Too much paperwork/bureaucracy	37.4%
Looking for a new challenge	18.9%
Retirement	16.1%
Seeking promotion	11.8%

**Table 3: Working additional hours**

Never	Less than once a week	Once a week	Several times a week
9.9%	17.4%	18.5%	36.9%

**Table 4: Length of additional working hours**

Less than an hour	1-2 hours	3-6 hours	7-10 hours
10.7%	31.2%	36.7%	11.7%

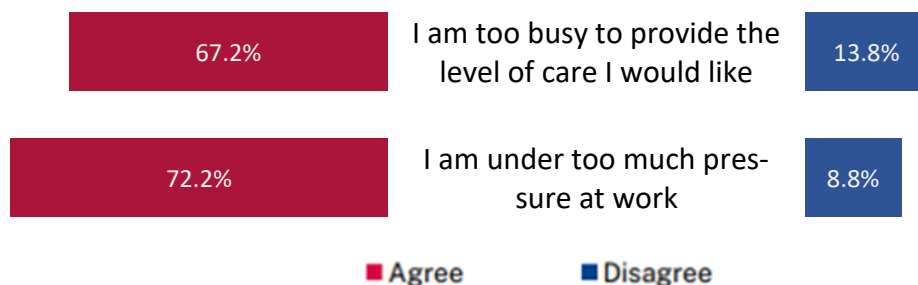
**Table 5: Payment for working additional hours**

Higher rate	Normal rate	Lower rate	As bank work	TOIL	Not paid	Combina- tion
6.5%	12.3%	0.2%	5.0%	21.9%	53.5%	0.5%

**Table 6: Taking annual leave**

Yes I have been able to take my entitlement	Not requested full entitlement	Asked to delay/ unable to take when wanted	Unable to take full leave or worked when on leave	No - other reason
63.5%	15.6%	1.7%	17.5%	1.7%

**Table 7: Impact of work intensification**



## Further information

If you would like any further information please contact Ross Sanderson, Senior Public Affairs Officer by email at [ross.sanderson@rcn.org.uk](mailto:ross.sanderson@rcn.org.uk) or 0131 662 6197.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and third sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and development opportunities. With over 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.





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