



Royal College
of Nursing
Northern Ireland

The RCN Manifesto

UK Government
General Election 2019



Nursing has always been at the heart of wider society, advocating on public issues and concerns. As the largest part of the health workforce, our contribution to health and life outcomes is absolutely unique. Our expertise is crucial to health and care policy and its implementation across the UK. Our expectations for a new UK Government, at a time of unprecedented uncertainty and inequality, are explicit.

We are present at every stage of people's lives. Working with individuals, families and communities, we are at the heart of multi-disciplinary care teams and every physical and mental health journey. We know the changing and increasing needs of people in the UK. We see potential for better care, and design how to do things differently. We lead services and systems, and within multi-disciplinary teams we work together to

plan care and use our particular skills and expertise in effective delivery. All people need the best chances in life, and we believe in policy which prevents inequalities and increases equality, recognises diversity and enables inclusion. We also believe that climate change undermines the very foundations of health and the effects are set to be catastrophic if we do not act now. We have a vital role to play in protecting and promoting public health in the face of these threats.

In all circumstances, we expect any government to lead honest, open conversations with the public and with nursing. For safety and outcomes alike we need credible strategy and investment, from prevention through to palliative care, and also in our people leading and delivering this care. People who need services deserve no less than this. Neither do we, or our colleagues across health and care.

THE ISSUES

We are proud of our profession and we are passionate advocates. There are specific things we need to see in each nation where the UK Government and Parliament have the mandate to make change.

Our major priority across the UK is staffing to ensure safe and effective care in all settings. The right numbers of nursing staff, with the right skills, at the right time and in the right place is essential for safe and effective care in all health and care services. When services are understaffed, patient safety and care is compromised. So is our health and wellbeing as nursing professionals.

We need more nursing professionals in the workforce in order to support our society.

Yet there are severe shortages across all settings and geographies.

Unprecedented numbers report burnout. People who use health and care services need more, and we deserve better.

We are mindful of the current uncertainty regarding the next steps for the UK's departure from the European Union. We have called for a People's Vote on the final Brexit deal since May 2018.

Brexit must in no way result in: a dilution of fair employment practices, watered down health and safety standards and workers' rights, have a detrimental impact on our ability to tackle communicable diseases and public health, or prevent cross-border exchange of knowledge and skills. Any future trade deals must not negatively impact our ability to provide safe and effective care.

Our manifesto outlines five areas where we expect action.

They are:

- 1. Addressing nursing workforce shortages**
- 2. Investment in health and social care services**
- 3. Investing in our nursing education and professional development**
- 4. Building a fit for purpose immigration system that enables nursing**
- 5. Improving our working conditions and pay for all nursing and care staff**

1 Addressing nursing workforce shortages

Workforce shortages across health and care leave many services with consistently unsafe staffing which compromise patient care and safety. Health and care services must have the right staff, with the right skills, in the right place at the right time, across all settings. Individual nurses, nursing staff and the public are too often left carrying risk when shifts are short staffed.

We call for:

- Legislation in each of the four countries enabling safe and effective care, which includes clear mechanisms for workforce planning and accountability.
- All four Governments to have a national workforce strategy which addresses shortages and solutions, underscored by population-based needs modelling.

2 Investment in health and social care services

We are a UK organisation and we are everywhere. While we work in a devolved context, governments across the UK rely on funding from the UK Government.

Investing in our health and care services is a political choice. We need sustained investment to improve lives, maintain and grow a skilled workforce and shape services to meet the needs of our population. The arrangements for funding settlements for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are complex.

The loss of EU funding needs to be fully replaced by the UK Government so that the social infrastructure allowing people to access public services and underpinning health and wellbeing is not irrevocably damaged. Health, social care

and public health are devolved matters in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund must respect the devolution settlement and the role of the national governments as the developer and distributor of these funds in each country, to ensure effective policy and investment.

We call for:

- A commitment to greater investment in health and care services across the UK in line with rising population need.
- Greater transparency from the UK Government over methods for establishing funding for devolved administrations, and for allocations to accurately reflect and speak to the level of investment required to deliver quality implementation of effective policy and funding in each country.

3 Investing in nursing education and professional development

Governments in the UK are not educating enough nursing staff to meet the needs of the population. Nursing students should have access to adequate financial support for tuition and the cost of living.

Governments must have robust planning arrangements for pre- and post-registration education to ensure that there are enough nurses to put our health and care workforce on a sustainable footing.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) enables us to develop our careers, become specialists, design and deliver innovative models of care. There is no retention of current staff and no transformation of service delivery without CPD.

Governments and employers must support us to access sufficient levels of CPD funding, alongside pay and career development opportunities, in a meaningful effort to recruit and retain the nursing workforce.

We call for:

- All nursing students to have access to adequate financial support
- Sufficient dedicated funding for CPD for all nursing staff, in all health and care settings, alongside pay progression and career development opportunities. Funding must be based on modelling on future service and population-based need.

Read more on these issues in our sections 'In Northern Ireland.'

4 A fit for purpose immigration system which enables nursing

We are a global profession and we must continue sharing skills and knowledge internationally.

Any future UK immigration system should ensure that the UK can attract and retain a highly skilled nursing workforce to provide quality care, meeting patient needs and enhances the overall health and wellbeing of our population.

Ethical international recruitment practices must include fair treatment of migrant nurses, alongside commitments to invest in and grow our health and care workforce within the UK.

The UK's withdrawal from the EU and the uncertainty surrounding it contains risks that, if not credibly addressed, may damage population health, as well as severely further impact on our ability to provide safe and effective care. It may also present new challenges and exacerbate existing ones around workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention of the existing and future nursing community we rely on from overseas.

We call for a future immigration system which:

- Is easy to understand and navigate, transparent, predictable, accessible, and affordable for nurses, health professionals and individuals to engage with
- Does not undermine the UK's commitment to recruit our international health and care colleagues in an ethical and transparent manner
- Recognises that salary is not the only determinant of skill or need for overseas recruitment, with a shift from using salary as the key measure of value/need in prioritising visas and for allowing working migrants to remain indefinitely in the UK
- Ensures that Tier 2 visas do not negatively impact on health and care services ability to recruit our overseas colleagues, especially in the short to medium term, and for the immigration health surcharge to be scrapped.

Any recruitment of our international colleagues must be part of a credible health and care workforce strategy in each country of the UK which also addresses growth of domestic supply. The UK and devolved governments should, in partnership with sector stakeholders, develop holistic long-term workforce plans with appropriate investment.

5 Improved working conditions and pay for all nursing and care staff

Investment in nursing staff is vital for the provision of high quality patient care.

It is only by rewarding nursing staff fairly and providing career development opportunities that health and care providers and employers can recruit and retain the workforce needed to deliver health care services needed now and for the future.

We should receive fair pay, good terms and conditions wherever we work. Better employment experiences are associated with better outcomes for patients. As a campaigner for the Real Living Wage, we believe this should underpin fair pay structures, wherever nurses and nursing support workers work.

It is fundamental that our nurses and nursing support workers are able to work in environments which are safe, accessible, inclusive, and protect health and wellbeing.

We call for:

- Investment in meaningful pay rises for all nursing and care staff providing publicly funded services from 2021/22 making up for the loss in earnings during the public sector pay cap.
- Work with health and care providers and employers to transform our workplace culture, tackling work-related violence, bullying, discrimination and third party harassment in our workplaces.
- Ensuring that all health and care providers and employers provide continuing professional development for nursing and care staff and require them to demonstrate improvements in, and the development of, professional nursing practice.
- Recognition and promotion of the importance of NHS pensions in retaining staff.
- Assurance that all current employment rights at the workplace are protected.

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

This General Election takes place against the background of an absence of government in Northern Ireland since the suspension of the Northern Ireland Executive and Northern Ireland Assembly in 2017. This has created a political vacuum in which important decisions about health and social care are not being taken. It also means that the health and social care system in Northern Ireland is lacking strategic direction, accountability and leadership. The RCN believes that the next UK Government must work constructively and tirelessly with Northern Ireland political representatives and stakeholders to bring about the restoration of Devolved Government. It must also ensure that UK government funding is sufficient to enable Northern Ireland departments to address the significant challenges and inequalities that currently exist within health and social care.

Addressing nursing workforce shortages

There are currently around 3,000 unfilled nursing posts within the health and social care service in Northern Ireland and this figure has doubled over the last two years.

The RCN estimates that a similar level of vacant nursing posts exists within the nursing home sector in Northern Ireland. At the same time,

expenditure on agency nursing is spiralling out of control in an attempt to fill the gaps. These shortages have a significant impact upon patient care and the nursing workforce. Effective workforce planning is required to start to address the nursing shortage. The restoration of pay equality with the other countries in the UK will help to attract the nursing staff that are urgently required to deliver safe and effective care to the people of Northern Ireland.

Investment in health and social care services

Although the Northern Ireland Department of Health is accountable for ensuring the appropriate resourcing of health and social care in Northern Ireland, it operates within a financial environment determined by the UK Government.

It is essential that the UK Government delivers appropriate funding to enable the Department of Health to facilitate the transformation of health and social care, ensure the delivery of safe and effective care and deliver pay equality for Northern Ireland nursing staff.

Investing in nursing education and professional development

Whilst the number of nursing students in Northern Ireland has increased slightly over the last two years, this will not come close to addressing the high level of nursing vacancies referenced.

The transformation of health and social care requires the right number of the right nurses in the right locations to deliver safe and effective care

to the people of Northern Ireland. This means investing particularly in community and public health nursing. Workforce planning and funding is required to ensure that Northern Ireland has enough nurses to meet the needs of patients, invests in the specialist nurses who can help deliver the transformation agenda, and ensures that all nurses are able to access the continuing professional development that they require in order to deliver safe and effective care to the people of Northern Ireland.

A fit for purpose immigration system which enables nursing

Nursing staff from overseas have a vital role to play in sustaining health and social care. The immigration system must facilitate and welcome nursing staff who wish to work in Northern Ireland.

The unique implications of Brexit for health and social care must also be addressed in order to ensure the continuing mobility of the nursing workforce and the sustainability of cross-border and All-Ireland services.

Improved pay and working conditions for all nursing and care staff

Urgent action is required to address the significant nursing pay inequality that exists compared with the other countries in the UK.

For example, a newly-qualified registered nurse in Northern Ireland now earns around £2,000 less each year than a counterpart elsewhere in the UK. This inequality is a major contributory factor to the nurse staffing crisis in Northern Ireland, as nurses leave in search of better pay whilst nurses from other countries choose to work elsewhere.

With a membership of around 435,000 registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, nursing support workers and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world.

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