Royal College of Nursing Scotland

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

ACROSS THE UK WE CALL FOR:

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 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 section ‘In Scotland’.

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 SCOTLAND

Scotland needs more nurses and nursing support workers to address workforce shortages and meet increasing demand. Action is needed to increase nurse education places, to encourage more people to choose nursing as a career and to retain nursing staff through improvements to pay, workload and workplace culture.

Addressing nursing workforce shortages

Our health and care services must have the right nursing professionals with the right skills in the right place at the right time.

Current workforce shortages have to be addressed through improvements to recruitment and retention. Nursing teams need to know they are valued and their unique contribution to the multidisciplinary team is recognised. A fully-funded workforce plan, with modelling based on workforce demographics and predicted changes in population and demand is required.

Investment in health and social care services

There must be greater investment in health and social care services.

Scotland has passed ground breaking safe staffing legislation but health and care services need to be properly funded to allow providers to meet their duties under the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019.

There must be greater transparency from the UK Government on the impact of funding announcements for the devolved nations.

Investing in nursing education and professional development

Investment in the nursing workforce of the future must continue.

Improvements to the bursary for nursing students in Scotland have been welcomed. The number of student places needs to increase and more must be done to support a range of people from across our communities to choose nursing as a career. The vital role of nursing within the multidisciplinary team must be acknowledged and supported with protected time for professional development and clear career pathways.

A fit for purpose immigration system which enables nursing

Nursing staff from overseas have a vital part to play in sustaining Scotland's health and social care services.

Where the need is identified, the UK's immigration system must be straight forward, timely and ensure nurses from overseas are supported to be able to take up roles within our health and care services.

Improved pay and working conditions

Further steps are required to address the years of below inflation pay increases within the NHS in Scotland and to make a nursing career in social care an attractive option.

Nursing staff must feel supported in their workplace and be given the confidence to speak up where they hold concerns about the quality or safety of care for people.

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.

007 942
November 2019

Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square
London
W1G 0RN

rcn.org.uk

Royal College of Nursing
Scotland