



Royal College
of Nursing
England

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 settings¹. 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 care².

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 staffed³.

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 section 'In England'.

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 population⁴.

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 ENGLAND

There are many areas of public policy which affect public health and patient care.

We call for the return of a full-time Chief Nursing Officer in Government at the heart of the Department of Health and Social Care to drive informed and effective decision making in Government policy.

Addressing nursing workforce shortages

Successive Governments have overseen ineffective workforce policy and funding, with a lack of oversight for supply, recruitment, retention and remuneration. The right number of 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 the health and wellbeing of professionals⁵.

There are currently unclear roles and responsibilities in Government and across the system for growing and developing the health and care workforce, to meet the needs of the population. The requirement for accountability, in decisions regarding workforce, must be applied to all publicly funded health and care settings. As well as hospitals, this also includes health visitors and school nurses in public health, general practice nursing, community nursing, mental health

and learning disability services, prisons, and everywhere else where nurses provide care.

We call for:

- A legal framework of duties and powers clarifying accountability for workforce supply; planning, recruitment, retention, remuneration and training. This must apply to all publicly funded health and care services, enabling clear roles for all involved in delivering this.
- Assurance and scrutiny of decision-making regarding planning and provision of workforce supply, which must be based on both current evidence, and professional nursing judgement, and with due regard to the needs of the population. Government should establish a baseline growth model for supply numbers entering the workforce each year, based on a set, constant percentage of the workforce
- Investment to increase the supply of new nursing staff, to respond to rising demand and need for health and care services.

Investment in health and social care services

Successive Governments have failed to make funding decisions for adult social care that are based on a robust assessment of the care needs of the population.

Local authorities are faced with impossible choices, people in need don't have their needs met and health services are put under pressure too. At the same time, there are not enough of us to deliver safe and effective care everywhere there are services.

We call for:

- A new long term funding settlement for social care, based on assessment of population need and sufficient to grow and develop the nursing workforce to meet population needs now and in the future.

- Mandatory collection and publication of workforce data from all providers of publicly funded health and care services, to allow for transparency and robust scrutiny into the impact of nursing shortages on the delivery of safe and effective care.

Any future public health and prevention strategy must be cross-governmental, establish prevention and good health and wellbeing for all as a shared goal for all government departments, and define roles, responsibilities and actions required at local, regional and national levels to deliver this.

- The Government should embed a consistent 'health in all policies' approach across government and develop prevention policies with a holistic focus on the wider social determinants of health.
- Government must reverse public health funding cuts and establish an increased, long-term and sustainable funding settlement for public health.

Investing in nursing education and professional development

Our nursing students in England are without credible and sufficient support for tuition or living costs, unlike other countries in the UK. The removal of nursing students' funding has not incentivised more people to start a nursing degree, as intended. Significant investment in nursing education is required urgently to start growing the number of nurses at pace and scale. It is also essential that the system has capacity to support excellent quality learning through fully funded clinical placements, as part of the nursing degree⁶.

What matters to undergraduate and postgraduate pre-registration nursing students is support with living costs while studying. We also believe there should be a funding model to incentivise retention of nursing staff within all publicly funded health and social care services, such as financial support for tuition or loan forgiveness.

Retention initiatives for those of us currently in the workforce, alongside investing in supply, are crucial to retaining and upskilling the nursing workforce from the moment people enter into study. Once entering in the workforce, access to, and sufficient funding for Continuing Professional Development is important.

We call for:

- Investment of at least £1 billion a year into nursing higher education to support tuition and living for an additional 24,000 undergraduate nurses over five years, as well as support for postgraduate students, and hardship support for those who need it
- A significant increase in funding for CPD, based on a population and service based needs and to ensure current workforce equipped to educate students on clinical placement in service.
- A long-term effective, properly resourced public facing communications campaign to promote nursing as a profession and encourage people to take up new incentives to do the nursing degree.
- Clinical placement capacity planning must be correlated with the full range of routes into nursing, including higher education and apprenticeship routes, ensuring that the routes are not competing for an insufficient number and range of placements.

REFERENCES

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6 Royal College of Nursing (2018) *Fund our Future Nurses* [Available at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/-/media/royal-college-of-nursing/documents/publications/2018/november/pdf-007348.pdf>]

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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November 2019

Royal College of Nursing

20 Cavendish Square

London

W1G 0RN

rcn.org.uk



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