

# FAIR PAY FOR NURSING

## Time to talk about nursing pay



Royal College  
of Nursing

# The fight for fair pay

Nursing has faced decades of underinvestment and the workforce is facing extreme pressures. Urgent action is needed to tackle staffing pressures, sickness, burnout, and a growing backlog of undelivered care.

When politicians neglect nursing, they neglect patients. Will you advocate for a fair pay rise this year to achieve a safely staffed workforce?

Having effective conversations creates lasting change. Your union's strength comes from its members - without you and your colleagues demanding change, the government sees no threat.

## 5 principles:

**Use these to talk to your colleagues today**

# Having a conversation

## Anger

Nursing has every reason to be angry. A successful conversation gets straight to the heart of the injustice you're facing: a decade of pay cuts, underinvestment and an overworked profession that cannot recruit or retain enough staff. Asking questions that make the link between pay and safety is a strong starting point.

## Hope

After years of mistreatment, you might give up hope. But collective action does create change. Help your colleagues to imagine a better future for the profession and discuss the steps you can take to make it happen. Remind them of your biggest motivations, like a profession that's paid its worth to deliver the safest, most effective care.

## Action

The passion and hope you've created is a springboard for action. Even actions that appear small have a big impact. To grow confidence in yourself and your colleagues, start small – wearing a badge or casting a vote is a great place to start. Next time, the action can be bigger, like talking to colleagues or holding an event.

# Principle 1:

## A matter of safety

There are currently tens of thousands of nursing vacancies across the UK. Staff are undervalued, underpaid and under supported. Your pay has a direct impact on your profession's ability to retain and recruit nursing staff and achieve the safe staffing levels and skill mix that safe patient care requires.



# Questions

How often do you work a shift where you're worried about patient care being compromised because there aren't enough staff?

Do you wish you could do better for the patients that you treat?

## Proof

A major study found that for each additional patient per nurse, the risk of death increases by 7%.

Nurses are acutely aware that when staffing levels are low, patient care is left undone. You know first-hand that staffing levels and skill mix have tangible impacts on the quality of care your patients receive.



The Lancet (2014), Nurse staffing and education and hospital mortality in nine European countries: a retrospective observational study

# Principle 2:

## An affordable change

Investing in the nursing workforce is something the government cannot afford not to do. This is a matter of patient safety and effective care. This isn't a case of having less to invest - it's a false economy and an irresponsible move that puts you and the public at risk. Failing to invest in nursing pay is a failure to invest in the health and care services that protect all of society.



# Questions

Should government be investing in nursing? Would your loved ones agree?

If you are worried about others facing financial difficulty, ask yourself, where would the money from your pay rise go?

Wouldn't the money go back into local shops and businesses, used to help your loved ones and ultimately, make your profession safer?

## Proof

In 2021, we carried out independent research which showed the economic benefits of paying you more. For example, if the government gave nursing a 10% pay rise, they would get back 81% of what this would cost them. Part of the 81% saving that they'd make would result from more effective recruitment, additional tax paid by staff and fewer written off student loans.



London Economics (2021), The Net Exchequer Impact of Increasing Pay for Agenda for Change Staff

# Principle 3:

## The sustainable option

Our health and care services are overwhelmed. Paying nursing staff fairly helps build a workforce that can meet the needs of the population now and in the future. By failing to invest today, the government is creating an even bigger problem for the future. It's our livelihoods and our patients that suffer.



# Questions

When your team is heavily dependent on agencies to fill in staffing gaps, how is your ability to work as a team affected?

When there is high turnover of staff at work, with colleagues coming and going, how does it impact on patient care?

If shortages of permanent staff continue, what will you experience in five years' time?

## Proof

In 2020, the government spent over £6 billion pounds on agency and bank staff in England<sup>1</sup>. Governments across the UK must invest properly in a permanent workforce that meets patient demand now and in the future. This includes adequate education and training for permanent staff and making the profession safe and attractive by paying you fairly.



<sup>1</sup> UK Parliament (2020), Written question and answer from Department of Health and Social Care

# Principle 4:

## Challenging a long-standing problem

Your profession has faced pay cuts for the past decade. You cannot allow this to become normal no matter how long the issue has lasted. Nursing is the largest profession that plays a critical role in patient safety – it must be one that is attractive to join and stay in, not one that forces professionals into financial hardship.



# Questions

After all you have given to education, training and every patient, is it fair that your pay has fallen?

Have you been able to keep up with the spiralling cost of living?

Have there been times when you or your colleagues have thought, 'it's just not worth it anymore', despite this being work that you love?

Given the essential, life-saving work that you do, should nursing be better paid to reflect the worth of the profession in society?

## Proof

You and your colleagues are worse off now than 10 years ago after years of pay freezes and below inflation pay deals. Between 2011-2021, Agenda for Change bands fell in value by an average of 11% in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.



# Principle 5:

## The possibility for change

Change is possible. Members have successfully campaigned to scrap the UK-wide public sector pay cap, reintroduce financial support for students in England and improve working conditions during the pandemic. Members also took successful industrial action in Northern Ireland to achieve pay parity.

In ballots across the UK, you made clear that the pay you were awarded for 2021-22 is unacceptable. A significant number said you're willing to take industrial action in protest. Members are rightly angry and have sent a clear signal to governments that significant change on pay is needed. Ultimately, you and your colleagues want what is best for your patients and the change you create is to protect the quality of care you can give them.



# Questions

Did you know that to take strike action, 50% of members would need to turn out and vote and the majority would need to vote in favour of it in England, Scotland and Wales? This is one of two possible thresholds that need to be met to take lawful industrial action, depending on the country you are in.

How do you think we can convince decision-makers to invest in our profession if we ourselves don't demand change?

## Proof

In 2019, your colleagues and RCN members in Northern Ireland took three days of strike action over the nurse staffing crisis and pay. Members voted to take strike action and it worked: Northern Ireland achieved equal pay with the rest of the UK and the fight for safer staffing continues.



# Your strength is in your numbers

Having conversations with colleagues is one of the most important things you can do. Your story about the way pay impacts on staffing levels at work can motivate not just colleagues, but also friends and family to demand better.

You have the power to create change by coming together and standing up for the profession.

The RCN will always give members a direct say on matters that affect you most. When you're invited to vote, use networks like WhatsApp, group meetings and events to encourage as many colleagues as possible to vote.

Your strength is in your numbers.

[\*\*rcn.org.uk/pay\*\*](https://rcn.org.uk/pay)