



23 June 2022

Paul Davies MS, Chair
Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

Dear Chair

I am writing to you in regard to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee's inquiry into the cost of living. The cost of living crisis is having a devastating impact on the nursing workforce who were already struggling.

The NHS is the largest employer in Wales and currently employs almost 89,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts. Nursing is the single largest professional group within the NHS, representing 40% of the total workforce. 91% of the nursing workforce is female.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is calling on the Governments across the UK to recognise that the salary of nursing staff has consistently fallen behind the cost of living and must rise significantly to reflect this. Costs have been spiralling at an unaffordable rate and are set to continue rising. RCN is ultimately calling on the Governments to ensure a pay increase that is 5% higher than the cost of living.

The RCN employment survey (2021) found that 58.3% of Welsh respondents reported that they took home more than half or all the household income. This is significant as it demonstrates the reliance and importance of the nursing salary.

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Mae'r RCN yn cynrychioli nrysys a nyrsio, gan hyrwyddo rhagoriaeth mewn arfer a llunio polisiau iechyd
The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies



Mae'r Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol yn Goleg Brenhinol a sefydlwyd drwy Siarter Frenhinol ac Undeb Llafur Cofestr Arbennig a sefydlwyd a dan Ddeddf Undebau Llafur (Cydgrynhoi) 1992.
The RCN is a Royal College set up by Royal Charter and a Special Register Trade Union established under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

“This job has an enormous financial impact on family life. I’ve been with my partner for two years and our first holiday together was last week, when we went to Cardiff under the current COVID-19 regulations for Wales. Even before this year we’d have to think twice about a family holiday with my partner’s children, or a night out at the cinema or theatre. Our big purchases like cars tend to be well-used or preowned. With Christmas approaching I have to think about dipping into my savings...Financial sacrifices certainly have to be made in this job. If I was in another job in another time I would have retired by now.” **(RCN Wales member, 2021)**

There are 25,822 registered nurses working for NHS Wales (July 2021). 46% of these are Band 5, earning between £25,655 to £31,533 after 4 years. This is £13.15 an hour, before tax. A nurse with over 4 years’ experience will earn a maximum of £16.17 an hour. When you consider that this salary is to support a household it is obvious to understand why nurses are struggling.

The RCN employment survey further identified that 59% of Welsh respondents expressed that they were considering leaving or planning on leaving the profession. When asked for the reasons as to why they want to leave nursing (tick all that apply), 69% said they felt undervalued, 58% said they were exhausted and 40% said it was due to their stress levels.

“Nurses are wondering if it’s worth the effort, trauma and stress, when they could earn roughly the same amount of money working in a supermarket” **(RCN Wales member, 2021)**

“My wife is a band three support worker [£21,396-£22,866] with the psychiatric liaison service. That is a very complex role. Our 20 year old daughter recently started working in a sushi stand in our local supermarket. Within two years our 20 year old will earn more filleting salmon than my wife will looking after people” **(RCN member, 2021)**

In addition it is important to consider the impact of the cost of living on nursing students. The most common age of an undergraduate student is between 18, this is not the case for nursing. The average age of a nursing student in the UK is 29.

In the UK anyone over the age of 21 is considered a mature student. There has been an increase in mature students from Wales being accepted onto nursing degrees. The number of Welsh people accepted onto a nursing degree aged 30-34 has increased by 18.5% since 2019.

A UK wide RCN survey found that 31% of nursing students had dependent children, 10% were single parents and 23% were caring for a sick, disabled or elderly relative. This demonstrates the importance of financial support for nursing students and ensuring that upon graduation they receive an appropriate salary that can support their caring needs.

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A recent survey by Ofwat found that 42% of respondents believe they were worse off now compared to a year ago. 35% of respondents were struggling to pay for petrol/travel, 33% were struggling to pay for their gas/heating and 32% were struggling to pay for their food shop.

Nursing staff caring for patients in their homes and other community settings most often use their own vehicle to travel to and from visits. Nursing staff are struggling to pay for petrol and cannot continue to drive such long distances to see patients, without an increase in reimbursement. In February 2022, the price at the pumps for petrol and diesel were 148.0p and 151.6p respectively, last week they were 188.7p and 196.4p. Those on NHS Agenda for Change (AfC) contracts, or with AfC mileage allowances in their contracts, can claim 50 pence per mile. This was temporary increase from the standard rate of reimbursement of 45 pence for the months April, May and June.

“Some district and community nursing staff who rely on their cars to visit patients are telling us they are paying £100 more on petrol every month, putting an additional strain on their finances. Faced with heavy workloads and real-terms pay cuts, they already have more than enough on the plate without this additional worry.” **(Brain Morton, RCN Officer)**


This is concerning considering Ofwat’s findings that over a third of respondents struggling to pay for petrol/travel. Additional research by the Bevan Foundation has identified that the average household expenditure is slightly lower in Wales than in the rest of the UK, but Welsh households spend slightly more on gas, electricity, and other fuel than the average UK household.

A pay increase for nursing staff would not only address the cost of living crisis but it would greatly benefit families across Wales.

I have attached a copy of the RCN Wales evidence to the Pay Review Body which calls on them to recommend a pay increase that will reduce the impact of the cost of living and support the recruitment and retention of nursing staff.

RCN Wales would appreciate any further involvement in the cost of living inquiry.

Kind regards
Yours sincerely



**HELEN WHYLEY, RN, MA
DIRECTOR, RCN WALES**

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About the Royal College of Nursing (RCN)

The Royal College of Nursing is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing, representing over 465,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, healthcare support workers and nursing students, including over 28,000 members in Wales. RCN members work in both the independent sector and the NHS. Around two-thirds of our members are based in the community. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with National Boards in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in nursing practice and shapes health and social care policy.