

## 2008 UNISON Pay Survey

### Introduction

UNISON conducted a survey of its health members in September 2008 that collected staff views on questions relating to pay, working conditions, recruitment/retention, work-life balance and the impact of reorganisation/restructuring.

The questionnaire was distributed on exactly the same basis as the survey conducted by UNISON last year, with a mailing to 8,000 randomly selected members and UNISON's branch network. The 2007 survey was UNISON's largest ever survey of its health membership at the time. However, the 2008 survey generated an even greater response of 3,367 forms, outstripping the previous year by almost 100%. This near doubling of the response rate is testimony to the strength of feeling among staff about pay, the scale of financial distress among employees and the desire for a fair revision of the 2009/10 pay rates as recompense for the effect of soaring inflation on pay packets.

The survey was completed by members working in a broad range of occupational groups, ranging from ancillary and maintenance staff, to administrative and clerical staff, nursing and midwifery staff, occupational therapy and other allied health professionals, professional and technical staff and senior managers.

The results were weighted to ensure that they accurately reflected our membership in terms of gender, race, occupation, all types of NHS settings and the four countries.

As a result of gathering this exhaustive body of opinion from staff across the NHS, we have been able to set out below the grassroots experiences and views in relation to labour market conditions, recruitment and retention. The data is presented as both the most up-to-date snapshot available of staffing opinion in the NHS and a valuable study of trends since previous UNISON surveys were conducted in 2007 and 2006.

### Executive Summary

- Inflation has bitten ever deeper into the pay packets of NHS staff over the last year, to the point that:
  - i. 72% of staff are worse off than this time last year;
  - ii. 90% of staff experienced a decline in pay against the cost of fuel and energy;
  - iii. 86% of staff experienced a decline in pay against the cost of food;
- 54% of NHS staff are now dependent on some form of additional payment such as overtime to maintain their standard of living;
- Almost a quarter of nursing and midwifery staff are taking additional jobs to make ends meet;

- 77% of staff reported an increase in their workload over the last year;
- The proportion of staff attributing their increased workload to recruitment problems and inability to attract staff has risen by 6% since 2007 to 35% this year;
- 51% of staff reported a decline in staffing levels in their department;
- Trusts have been increasingly resorting to the use of Bank and agency staff to fill staff shortages. The proportion of staff observing this response has jumped 5% since 2007 to 40% this year;
- 28% of staff believed that quality of patient care delivered by their department has decreased over the last year, while just 11% observed an improvement;
- Three quarters of staff have given some level of consideration to leaving the NHS over the last year;
- 56% of staff pinpointed pay levels as their main reason for considering leaving;
- Most of those considering leaving would take jobs outside the NHS entirely;
- The proportion of staff citing commitment to the value of their work as a reason for remaining in the service has plummeted from 75% to 56%.
- The scale of staff shortages and increased use of Bank/agency staff uncovered by the survey suggests that official NHS vacancy figures from over six months ago paint a distorted picture of the real recruitment and retention situation facing the NHS;
- The sustained damage inflicted on wages by inflation is stoking widespread anger and dissatisfaction that is liable to break out into significant recruitment and retention problems unless pay levels are addressed.

### **Impact of inflation**

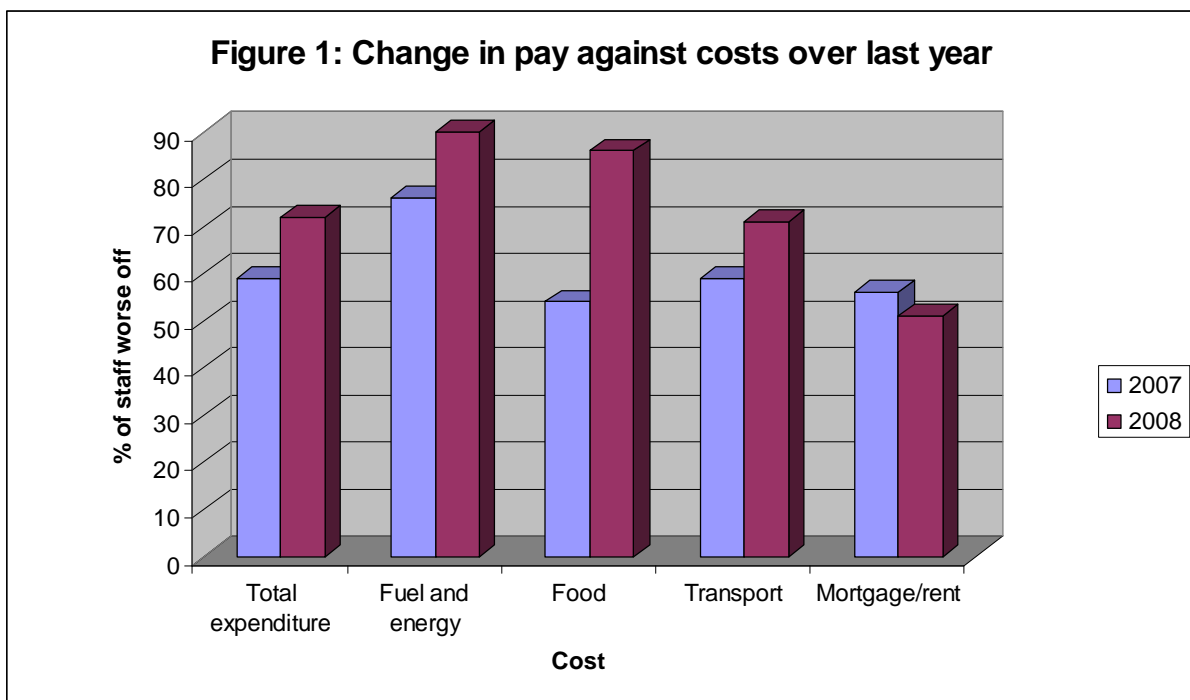
The 2008 survey provided a conclusive picture of the impact of inflation on NHS staff. When asked how they felt their pay had changed relative to the cost of living over the last year, almost three-quarters (72%) stated that they were worse off. This represented one of the largest changes on the 2007 survey results, when only 59% reported a decline.

The main reasons for this response were uncovered when staff were asked how their pay had changed against specific aspects of expenditure. Of the eight expenditure categories defined, more than half staff felt that they were worse off when comparing pay against the costs of six expenditure categories.

The impact of inflation was felt at its most acute in covering the costs of fuel and energy, with the proportion reporting that they were worse off hitting 90% (up from 76% in 2007), and in meeting food bills, with the proportion reporting that they were worse off surging to 86% (up from 54% in 2007).

However, the costs of transport also rose significantly against pay, with 71% reporting that they were worse off compared to 59% in 2007. Mortgage / rent payments were one of the few areas that appeared to show a slight improvement on last year, probably reflecting the filtering through of cuts in the Bank of England base rate for some home owners. Nonetheless, 51% of staff still reported that they were worse off in meeting such housing costs.

A summary of the changes to the principal components of household expenditure are shown in Figure 1 below.



Against this background of inflation cutting the real value of NHS wages, 54% of staff reported that they were dependent on some form of extra payments within the NHS to maintain their standard of living. The survey found that 36% of staff gained payment on top of basic pay from unsocial hours, 24% from overtime and 5% from on-call arrangements. Furthermore, staff lower down the pay bands were even more dependent on such extra payments. For example, 57% of Band 2 staff relied on overtime payments to maintain their standard of living.

Not only are cost pressures forcing staff to work longer or unsocial hours, but 15% of total staff are turning to additional jobs to make ends meet. In the case of some occupations, such as nursing and midwifery, the figure reaches even higher at close to a quarter of the profession. Of those staff taking additional jobs, 43% are working

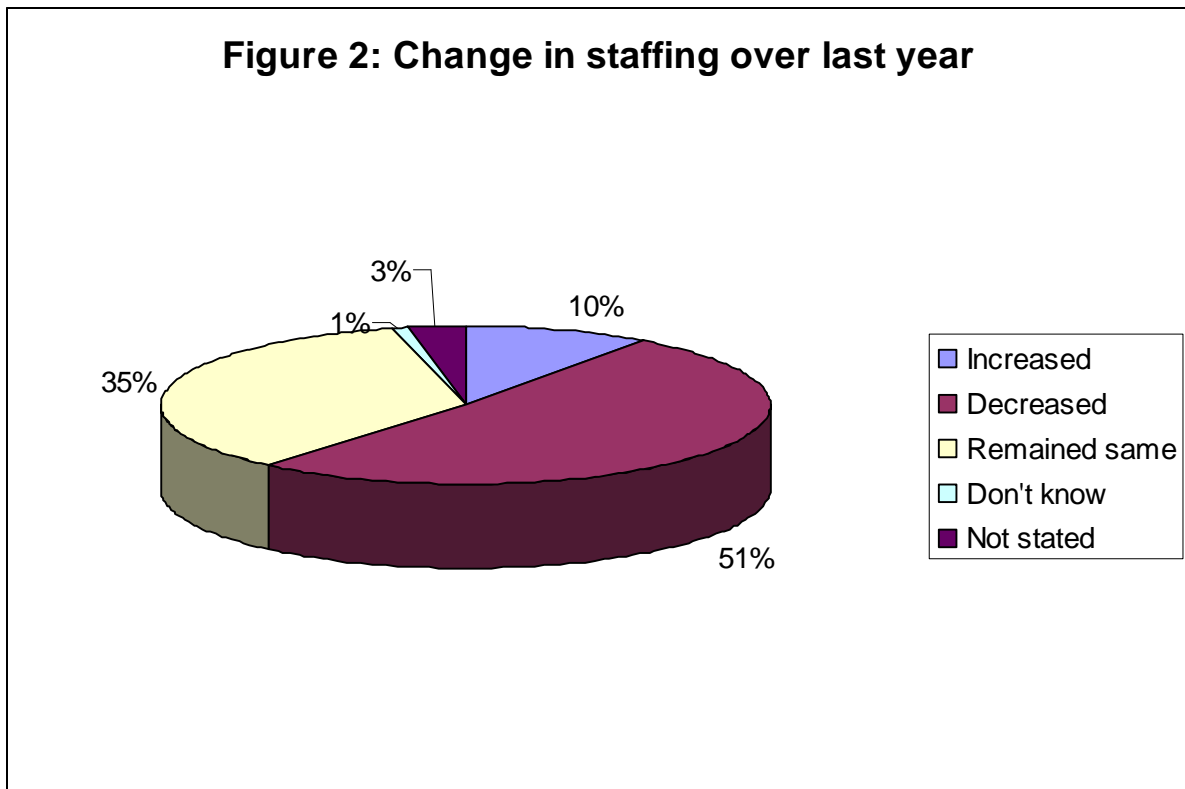
as NHS Professionals or Bank staff, 7% in another NHS role, 12% as other agency staff and 45% outside the NHS entirely.

### Impact of staffing levels

The survey demonstrated the continued pressures under which staff are operating, with 77% reporting that workload had increased and 73% that stress had increased in their immediate working environment over the last year.

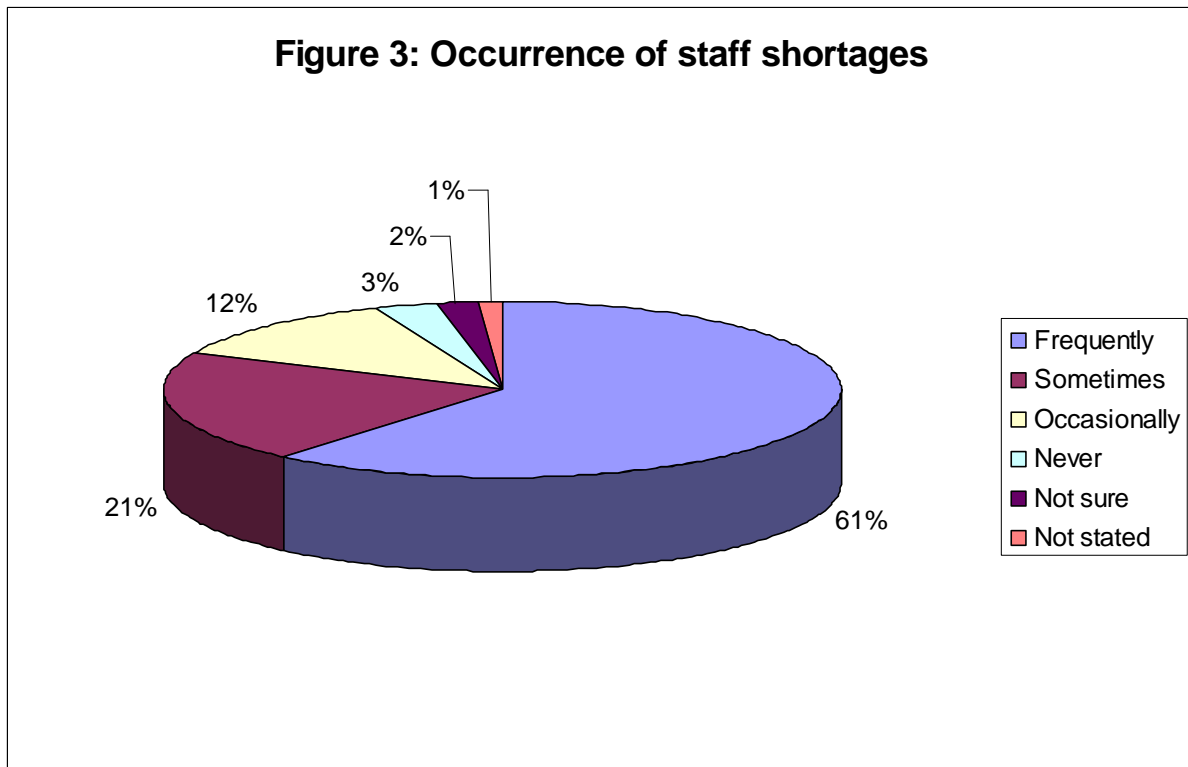
The results also suggest that this situation is connected to a continued squeeze on recruitment among many trusts as 51% of staff reported that the number of staff in their department had decreased against just 10% reporting a rise (see figure 2 below). In fact, 35% of staff indicated that their employer has announced a reduction in posts over the last year. These findings were backed up by the most recent statistics released by the NHS Information Centre, showing that the size of the NHS workforce declined by 7,362 in terms of headcount over the year to September 2007 and 6,004 in terms of full time equivalents over the same period<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, 34% of respondents observed that trusts were responding to vacant positions by increasing their use of agency staff. Whereas in 2007 20% of respondents observed that trusts were decreasing their use of agency staff, that proportion fell dramatically over 2008 to just 13%.



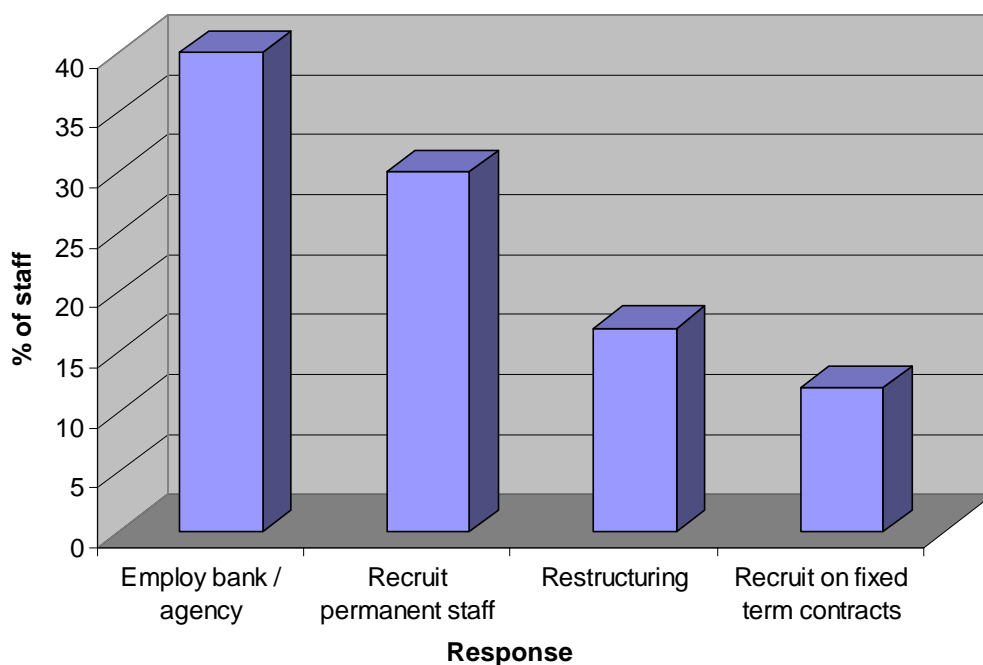
<sup>1</sup> The Information Centre Non-Medical Workforce Census 2008

When asked whether staff shortages had occurred in their department over the last year, just 3% stated that they never took place and the overwhelming majority (61%) gave them the highest ranking as a frequent occurrence (see figure 3 below).



The most common response by trusts to alleviating staff shortages has been to employ Bank and agency / NHS Professionals staff. In fact, this response has shown an increasing trend over the last year, rising from 35% in 2007 to 40% in 2008. The four most common responses are shown in figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Trust response to staff shortages**



This tendency was backed up by the finding that just under a quarter of staff estimated that they were working in departments where the proportion of Bank of NHS Professionals / agency staff exceeded a quarter, which represented a rise from 20% in 2007.

The survey results confirm the latest statistics collected by the NHS Information Centre showing that, at the same time as the size of the total NHS non-medical workforce has declined, the use of Bank staff has been going in the opposite direction, rising by 7% in the year to September 2007<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, posts would otherwise show as vacancies are being filled by Bank staff.

As a consequence of these staffing pressures, 28% of staff believed that the quality of care delivered by their department had decreased over the last year as opposed to 11% who observed an improvement.

When those who reported an increase in workload were asked to identify the reasons for the change, the two most popular factors remained the imposition of additional duties and responsibilities (highlighted by 75% of respondents) and insufficient staffing for sickness, maternity and holiday cover (58% of respondents).

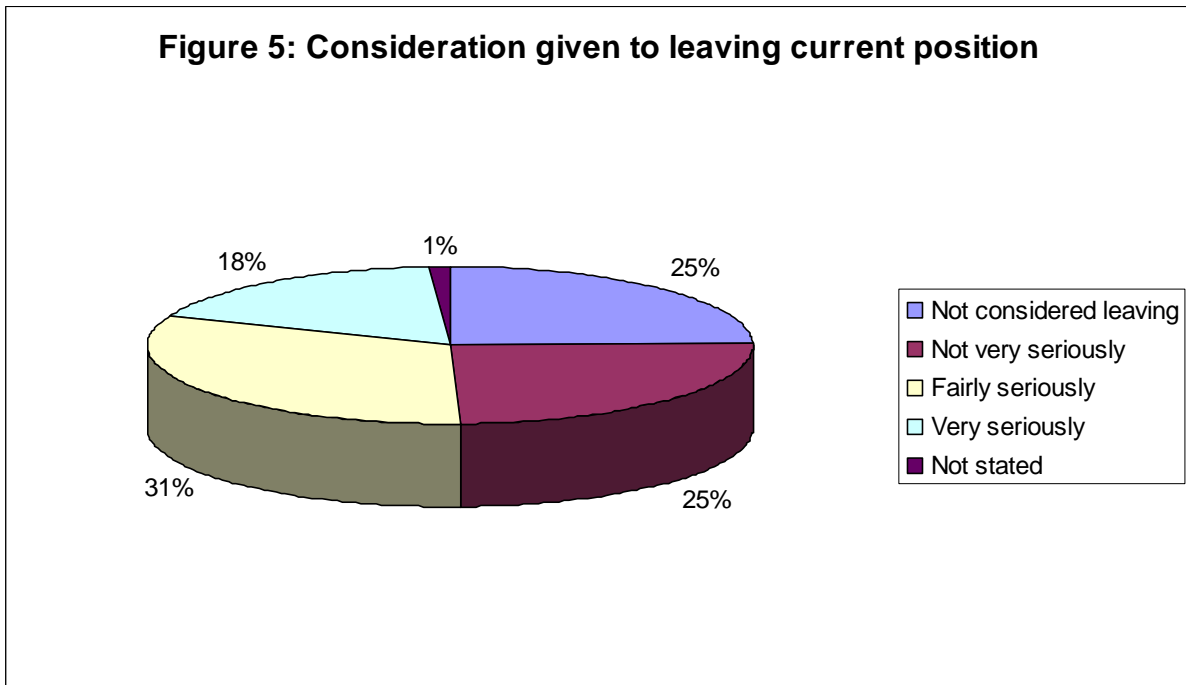
However, the factor that shot up the rankings related to the numbers attributing their workload to recruitment problems and inability to attract staff. In 2007, 29% of staff had identified this factor but by 2008 the proportion had jumped to 35%.

<sup>2</sup> The Information Centre Non-Medical Workforce Census 2008

The upshot of these developments was that 57% of staff suffering an increased workload felt that it had resulted in a detrimental effect on their personal health and morale remained in a poor state, with 56% of respondents defining morale in their department as low or very low.

## Recruitment and Retention

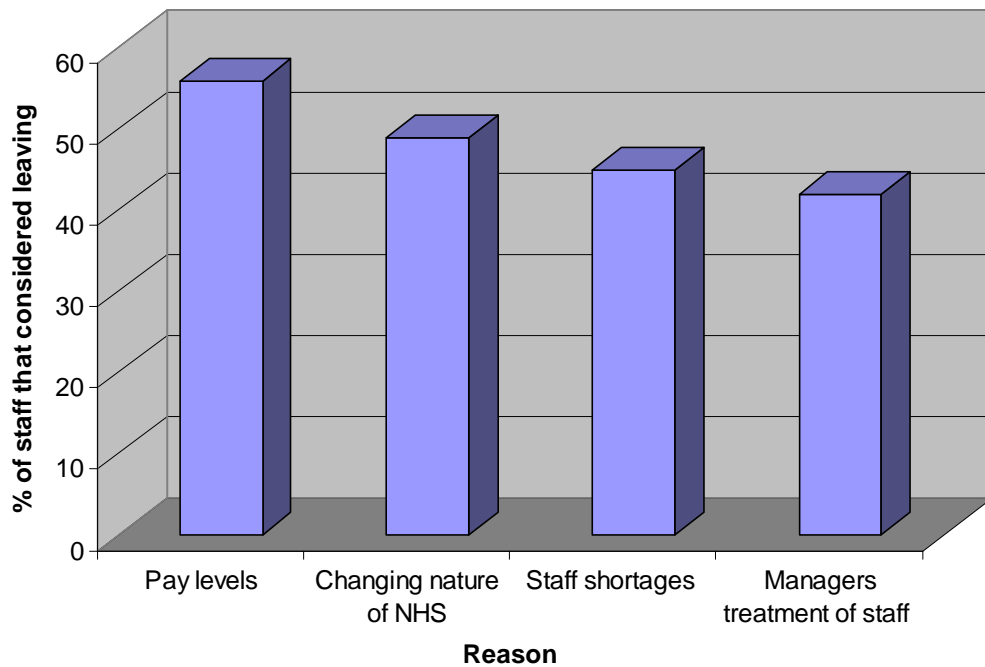
The survey revealed the scale of dissatisfaction among NHS staff with the finding that three-quarters of employees had given some level of consideration to leaving their jobs over the last year. A quarter had given some consideration, though not very seriously, 31% had considered leaving fairly seriously and 18% had given very serious consideration to leaving (see figure 5 below). Among some occupational groups such as Allied Health Professionals and PTB staff, the proportion considering very seriously has reached even higher to around a quarter of the workforce.



When asked to pinpoint the reasons for their desire to leave the NHS, staff rated the level of pay as the main reason that would drive them out of the health service. In fact, pay took an even larger lead over all other factors by rising from 53% of the total in 2007 to 56% in 2008. Among Ambulance and PTB staff pay was identified as the principal reason by two-thirds of the workforce.

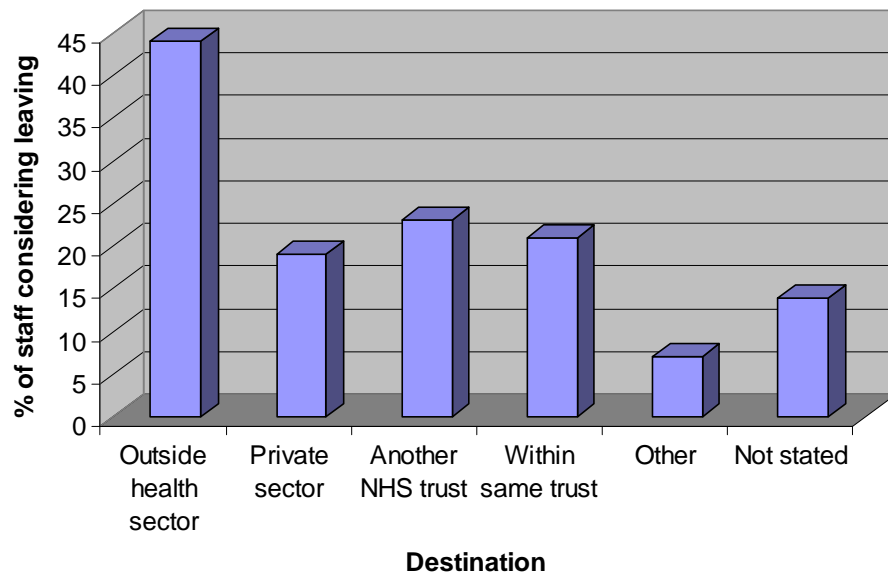
The four leading factors identified by all staff are shown in figure 6 below and in line with previous findings, the pressure created by unfilled posts shows through in the finding that staff shortages were the third highest rated factor.

**Figure 6: Four main reasons for considering leaving**



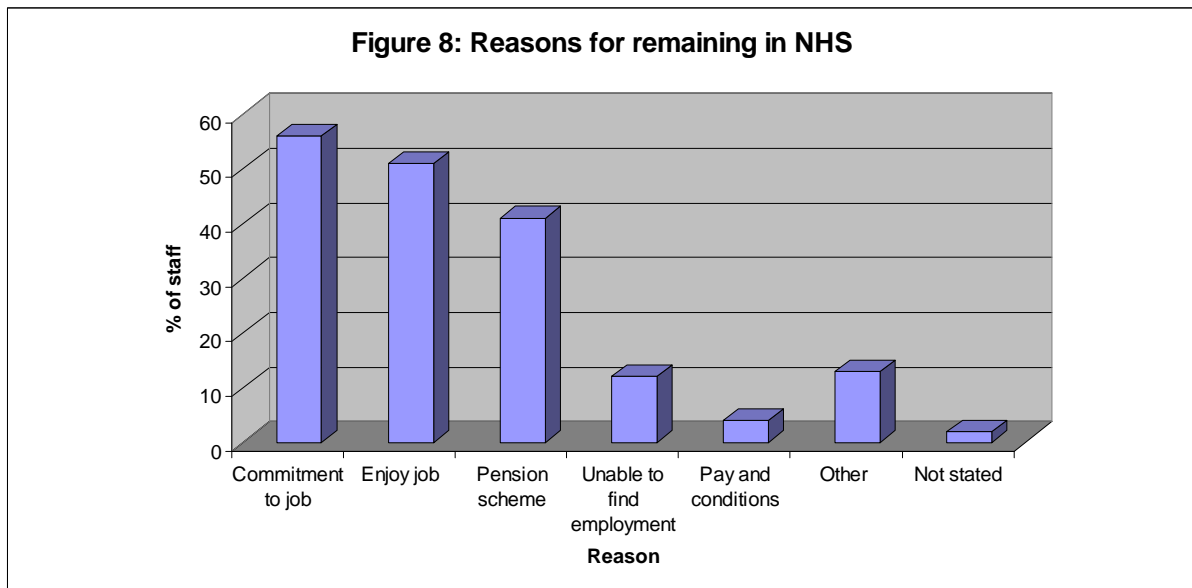
Worryingly, almost half of those who had considered leaving intended to exit the health sector entirely while a further 19% were looking at moving to the private or independent sector. The full results, showing the dominance of the tendency to lose talent from the NHS, are shown in figure 7 below.

**Figure 7: Destination of staff considering leaving**



The wearing effect of declining real pay rates and staff shortages is demonstrated by the survey finding that, though commitment to the value of the work remains the main reason that staff stay in the NHS, the proportion of staff citing this reason declined from 59% in 2007 to 56% in 2008. In fact, going back to the 2006 UNISON survey when 75% highlighted this commitment, it appears that the goodwill displayed by staff toward the NHS as a life saving and caring profession is showing marked signs of eroding.

The full results shown in figure 8 below also show that while the NHS pension scheme still offers an attraction to staff, a negligible 4% of staff remain in the service because of pay and conditions.



## Conclusions

This major survey of NHS staff views and experiences conducted in September 2008 confirms everything that the official figures on inflation rates for basic items of consumption have suggested over many months. NHS staff and their families have been suffering under ever greater assaults on the real value of their wages and the immense response to our survey is testimony to the desire to communicate these consequences to the NHS Pay Review Body.

However, the survey has also drawn out some highly pertinent points to the issue of recruitment and retention.

Firstly, the picture emerging from staff casts doubt on the conclusions that can be drawn from NHS vacancy statistics, since the majority of staff are still pointing to a decline in staffing levels and frequent staff shortages. In fact, 35% have experienced actual post reductions over the last year. Coupled with this the increasing trend to cover shortages with bank / agency staff and it is apparent that reduced staffing levels or the filling of posts without advertising vacancies are liable to have a distorting effect on published vacancy rates.

Secondly, the simmering frustration stoking recruitment and retention problems in the future is apparent in the finding that the NHS is an employer that has three-quarters of its workforce giving some form of consideration to leaving and a fifth giving serious consideration to leaving.

Our series of surveys present a strong indication that the NHS is in danger of squandering the goodwill on which it relies as the proportion of staff citing commitment to the value of their work as a reason for remaining in the service has plummeted from 75% to 56%.

While their reasons for staying decline, staff are absolutely clear that their main reason for considering leaving the service is the level of pay and the majority make it plain that they would leave the NHS entirely.

Therefore, whatever the official NHS recruitment and retention data states today, our survey suggests that the sustained damage inflicted on wages by inflation is storing up growing dissatisfaction that will break out into a surge of staff leaving the service unless this core issue is addressed promptly.