

ONE TEAM

A purple circular logo with a white dotted border containing the text '2k' in white.

Why £2k would make us stay: UNISON survey of NHS staff

The survey was launched on 11 December 2020 and ran for a month, gaining around 10,500 responses from staff directly employed in the NHS across the UK. The survey was conducted as part of ongoing work to inform UNISON's campaign for a minimum £2,000 pay rise for all NHS staff.

Respondents are drawn from the full range of job roles in the NHS apart from doctors. They include nurses, healthcare assistants, ambulance staff, porters, cleaners, catering staff, medical secretaries, occupational therapists, healthcare scientists and administrators – the whole NHS team.

The survey asked staff for their views on

- how the pandemic has affected the work they do
- how their current pay affects their financial situation
- how likely they are to leave the NHS
- government treatment of NHS staff
- the potential impact of a £2,000 pay rise.

The tables below present the key findings.

Changes to work as a result of Covid

Four in ten respondents (39 per cent) have worked in Covid wards or areas during the pandemic and a quarter (24 per cent) have been redeployed from their usual role or setting.

Across the board staff have stepped up to the plate to respond to the pandemic with over two-thirds (69 per cent) of respondents having to learn and use new skills.

Q. Have you worked on a Covid-19 specific ward or area at any time?

| | |
|-----|-----|
| Yes | 39% |
| No | 61% |



ONE TEAM 2k

Q. Have you been redeployed due to the Covid-19 pandemic at any time?

Yes 24%
No 76%

Q. Have you had to learn and use new skills due to the Covid-19 pandemic? (including clinical, technical, IT, and administrative skills)

Yes 69%
No 31%

Pay and financial strain

NHS staff are feeling the pinch as pay has failed to keep up with their cost of living. As a result, 70 per cent of respondents report that they are worse off than a year ago.

For significant numbers of staff the situation is serious enough for them to seek help, with over a third of respondents (34 per cent) having asked for financial support from family or friends, and one in ten using a debt advice service. Of particular concern is the use of predatory financial services, with seven per cent reporting using payday loans.

Q. Overall, compared to 12 months ago, how do you feel your pay has changed relative to your cost of living?

I am worse off 70%

Q. Have you done any of the following this year?

| | |
|--|-----|
| Asked for financial support from family or friends | 34% |
| Used a debt advice service | 10% |
| Used a payday loan company | 7% |

For many staff their NHS salary now needs to go further reflecting the negative impact of the pandemic on other wage earners in their households. For more than two in five respondents (44 per cent) their NHS salary now makes up a larger part of their household income and of those, 60 per cent say this is a result of changes to the earnings of others in the household.



ONE TEAM 2k

Q. Compared to 12 months ago, how does your NHS salary relate to your total household income?

My salary makes up a larger part of our household income 44%

Q. What has caused this change?

Changes to the earnings of others in my household 60%

Intention to leave the NHS

Declining morale, financial pressure, the toll taken by working through the pandemic, the sense of not being valued – all these are coinciding with worrying numbers of staff considering leaving the NHS. For some this is an immediate issue – for others it’s as soon as the jobs market picks up or retirement becomes an option.

The vacancy problem in the NHS was well documented pre-pandemic and already represented a huge recruitment challenge for the years ahead. If existing staff leave in large numbers over the next year, the problem will become much bigger and the ability of the NHS to recover will be severely hampered.

Over half of respondents in the survey (52 per cent) are considering leaving their current job in the next year, with over a third of staff (34 per cent) doing so fairly or very seriously.

Q. Are you considering leaving your current position in the NHS within the next year?

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| No, I am not considering leaving | 48% |
| Yes, but not very seriously | 18% |
| Yes, fairly seriously | 23% |
| Yes, very seriously | 11% |

Of those staff considering leaving, half say they will stay in the NHS until the current pandemic crisis has ended while 82 per cent say they would leave the NHS if good jobs are available elsewhere. Of greatest concern, more than one in five of those staff considering leaving (22 per cent) report that they will leave the NHS ‘whatever happens’.



ONE TEAM 2k

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (net agree)

| | |
|--|-----|
| Whatever happens I will leave the NHS | 22% |
| I want to bring forward my retirement plans | 44% |
| I will stay in the NHS until the current pandemic crisis has ended | 50% |
| I would leave the NHS if good jobs are available elsewhere | 82% |

Attitudes to government

NHS staff feel strongly about government action or inaction on NHS pay and what that says about how they are valued. There is a high level of anger and discontent among staff which is making many question their future in the NHS.

Only one in ten (ten per cent) respondents feel valued by their government and nearly nine out of ten (85 per cent) feel angry about government treatment of NHS staff. Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) say the government approach to NHS pay is making them question their future.

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (net agree)

| | |
|---|-----|
| I feel like the Government values NHS staff | 10% |
| The government approach to NHS pay makes me question my future working in the NHS | 64% |
| I feel angry at how the government treats NHS staff | 85% |

Devolved government analysis

Breaking down responses about feelings towards government and intention to stay in the NHS shows a broadly consistent picture across the devolved administrations – except for a significant variation among respondents from Scotland. Here 29 per cent feel NHS staff are valued by government compared with the UK-wide average of 10 per cent. There is also a smaller proportion of respondents from Scotland agreeing that the government approach to pay makes them question their future in the NHS (39 per cent vs 64 per cent UK-wide). And there is a lower proportion feeling angry towards government (69 per cent for Scotland vs 85 per cent UK-wide).

This may be because the survey picked up on some key Scottish government announcements made shortly before it went out: willingness to enter pay negotiations with health unions and backdate any pay award to an early settlement date of December 2020; and the announcement of a no-strings bonus for all NHS staff of £500.



ONE TEAM 2k

Impact of meeting UNISON's claim for a £2,000 pay rise

The survey findings above paint a picture of the huge contribution NHS staff are making through the pandemic while grappling with financial hardship for themselves and their families. The responses show a worrying potential for large numbers of staff to leave the service in the coming year linked to feelings of anger and disillusionment with government approaches to NHS pay.

But the survey also shows that positive government action on pay can help turn this around. Such action would make a real difference to staff, to the future of the NHS and to the health of the wider economy.

A £2,000 rise would make a meaningful difference to virtually all respondents (95 per cent), boosting morale for 91 per cent and giving over four out of five (83 per cent) more confidence about staying in their current job.

And it would be good news for local high streets and the economic recovery effort as nearly four out of five respondents (78 per cent) would spend more in their local economies.

Q. If the government did agree to fund UNISON's pay claim for a £2,000 increase for all NHS staff what would that mean for you? (net agree)

| | |
|---|-----|
| It would make a meaningful difference to me | 95% |
| It would boost my morale | 91% |
| It would make me feel more confident I can afford to stay in my current job | 83% |
| I would spend more in my local shops and hospitality businesses | 78% |

In their own words

Stephen, a band 2 domestic, said:

"I work as a facilities operative [domestic] for a Community Health Trust. As a [band] 2 employee I earn 18000 per annum, £9.28 per hour. For this my work involves front line contact with Covid 19 patients. Each day I take my life in my hands by my exposure. I am not complaining, it is a vocation not just a job. However, I wonder if the general public are aware of the risks I'm exposed to compared to my financial reward. I believe they would be shocked."



ONE TEAM 2k

Linda, a band 6 adult nurse, said:

“I have recently considered leaving my job because I don’t feel valued by the government or my employer. The government has underpaid nurses for years then they expect us to [staff] the front line in a war against a deadly virus. A pay rise would be one incentive for me to stay working in the NHS, and a £2,000 pay rise would mean I could put some savings away for a rainy day, and not be as anxious about finances on my retirement.”

Kevin, a band 7 manager, said:

“Over time the Government has deliberately kept NHS pay rises low, and the effect of inflation on earnings has meant that there is less money to pay for council tax, gas, electricity, food, petrol etc. A £2000 pay rise would go some way to help to make up the shortfall we have seen in previous pay awards. We have to see future pay awards stepping up to keep pace with inflation. I have spent 37 years working full-time in the NHS. [If there is a pay rise] I probably will stay a bit longer than I planned to. I am 60 in April 2022 so I could take my pension and go. If the Government treats NHS staff with positive pay policy going forward, I might stay longer. The NHS would keep my skills and knowledge.”

Sandra, a band 4 administrator in mental capacity safeguarding, said:

“2020 was a very difficult year for us. If the Government don’t consider a decent pay increase for NHS workers...I would consider leaving purely to receive better pay to cover the increase in our financial expenditure. My type of role could command a lot more outside the NHS, and £2,000 would go a long way to helping us get back on track with our finances, paying off credit cards and other bills etc.”

Sharon, a band 7 mental health nurse, said:

A £2,000 pay rise would make a lot of difference. I have had to purchase my own personal equipment to conduct my role and offer therapy from home. It would go some way to recoup my additional expenses [such as] heating, electricity, ink, paper etc. Everything [I have needed] for a pop up office in my dining room.

Sam, a band 5 field engineer, said:

The extra stress Covid has brought on for no extra additional gains has made me rethink [staying in the NHS]. I could go to another job, do the same role, with similar pay for far less stress. A £2,000 pay rise would mean I'd stop looking for another job. I'm at the top of my band, so with no pay increases due, [a £2,000 pay rise] would be ideal.

