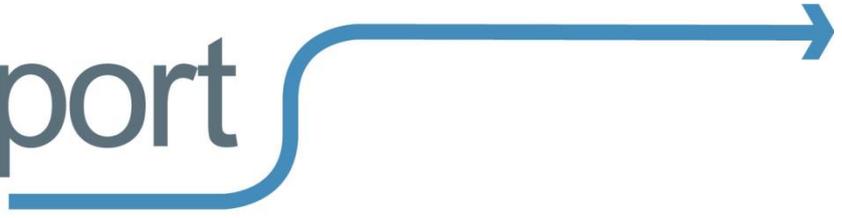


**ies** Report

Institute for Employment Studies



# The 2024 Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession

A report for the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

Billy Campbell, Claudia Plowden Roberts, Dilys Robinson

October 2024

## Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and organisational human resource management. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For 50 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has around 50 multidisciplinary staff and international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the Internet. Our values infuse our work. We strive for excellence, to be collaborative, and to bring curiosity to what we do. We work with integrity and treat people respectfully and with compassion.

## Inclusive Terminology

The terminology used to define ethnicity continues to evolve, and greater awareness has arisen about gender, cognitive differences as well as disability. IES seeks to be a learning organisation; as such we are adapting our practice in line with these shifts. We aim to be specific when referring to each individual's ethnicity and use their own self-descriptor wherever possible. Where this is not feasible, we are aligned with the Race Disparity Unit (RDU) which uses the term 'ethnic minorities' to refer to all ethnic groups except white British. RDU does not use the terms BAME (black, Asian, and minority ethnic) or BME (black and minority ethnic) as these terms emphasise certain ethnic groups and exclude others. It also recommends not capitalising ethnic groups, (such as 'black' or 'white') unless that group's name includes a geographic place. More broadly, we understand that while individuals may have impairments it is society that disables them, hence we refer to disabled people. Not all people identify with male or female and we reflect their self-descriptions in our work and use the term non-binary should an abbreviation be necessary. We value neurodiversity. Where possible we always use people's self-descriptors rather than impose categories upon them.

Institute for Employment Studies  
City Gate  
185 Dyke Road  
Brighton BN3 1TL  
UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1273 763400  
Email: [askIES@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:askIES@employment-studies.co.uk)  
Website: [www.employment-studies.co.uk](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk)

Copyright © 2024 Institute for Employment Studies

IES project code: 6376

## Acknowledgements

The authors are indebted to the veterinary nurses who gave up their time to participate in the 2024 Survey of the Professions. We also wish to thank Eleanor Taylor, Ben Myring, Angharad Belcher, Vicki Bolton and Lizzie Lockett at the RCVS for their support in developing and testing the questionnaire and reviewing the survey reports. The expertise of Ellie Cooper and Sara Butcher at IES in building and testing the survey and formatting the report is greatly appreciated, as is the support of Megan Edwards in the development of the questionnaire, the survey process, and the analysis plan.

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Who are the vet nurses who responded? .....	7
What jobs do vet nurses have? .....	8
How do they feel about their work? .....	9
How do they feel about the RCVS? .....	10
What does the future look like? .....	10
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>12</b>
1.1 Background .....	12
1.2 Survey process.....	12
1.3 Response .....	13
1.4 Data input and survey analysis .....	13
1.5 Report structure.....	14
<b>2 Personal details</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.1 Demographic characteristics .....	15
2.1.1 Age.....	17
2.1.2 Gender .....	17
2.1.3 Age by gender .....	18
2.1.4 Sexual orientation.....	19
2.1.5 Ethnicity.....	19
2.2 Relationship status .....	20
2.3 Pregnancy and parental leave .....	21
2.4 Responsibility for dependants.....	21
2.5 Health conditions and disabilities (physical and mental) .....	22
2.6 RCVS status.....	23
2.7 Veterinary nursing qualification.....	23
2.7.1 Year of qualification .....	23
2.7.2 Qualification country .....	23
2.7.3 Primary qualification .....	24
2.7.4 Qualification prior to veterinary nursing studies.....	24
2.8 Social mobility .....	25
2.8.1 Occupation of main household earner .....	26
2.8.2 Schooling.....	27
2.8.3 Eligibility for free school meals.....	27
2.8.4 Parents' or guardians' level of education .....	28
<b>3 Work status</b> .....	<b>30</b>
3.1 Employment status .....	30
3.2 Unemployment .....	31
3.3 Career breaks.....	31
3.4 Leaving the profession.....	32
3.5 Retirement.....	34
<b>4 Work in the UK</b> .....	<b>35</b>
4.1 Country of employment.....	35
4.2 Citizenship.....	36
4.3 Moving to the UK.....	37
4.3.1 Motivations for moving.....	37
4.3.2 Intentions to remain .....	38
<b>5 Work outside the profession</b> .....	<b>40</b>
5.1 Summary of those working outside the veterinary nursing profession.....	40
5.2 Type of work.....	41
5.3 Ever worked in the profession?.....	42

5.3.1	<i>Length of time in the profession</i> .....	42
5.3.2	<i>Roles held in the profession</i> .....	42
5.3.3	<i>Reasons for leaving/not joining the profession</i> .....	43
5.4	Intention to join/re-join the profession .....	43
<b>6</b>	<b>Work within the profession</b> .....	<b>44</b>
6.1	Summary of working within the profession.....	45
6.1.1	<i>Demographics</i> .....	45
6.1.2	<i>Primary place of work</i> .....	46
6.1.3	<i>Organisation type</i> .....	47
6.1.4	<i>Main area of work</i> .....	49
6.1.5	<i>Working hours</i> .....	50
6.1.6	<i>Working on-call</i> .....	51
6.1.7	<i>Work-related benefits</i> .....	55
6.1.8	<i>Additional jobs</i> .....	56
6.2	Career plans.....	58
6.2.1	<i>Career</i> .....	58
6.2.2	<i>Plans to retire</i> .....	59
6.2.3	<i>Reasons for planning to leaving the profession</i> .....	59
6.3	Learning and development .....	62
6.3.1	<i>Study plans</i> .....	62
6.3.2	<i>Continuing Professional Development (CPD)</i> .....	63
6.3.3	<i>Supporting Student Vet Nurses and vet students on extra mural studies</i> .....	66
6.3.4	<i>Appraisals</i> .....	68
<b>7</b>	<b>Work in clinical practice</b> .....	<b>69</b>
7.1	Regional breakdowns .....	71
7.2	Rural or urban .....	73
7.3	Work activities .....	74
7.4	Clinics.....	75
7.5	Expertise provided.....	76
7.6	Position in practice .....	77
7.7	Practice ownership .....	78
7.8	Working as a locum .....	79
7.9	Working time on different animals and other practice activities .....	79
7.10	Routine visits .....	81
7.11	Remote services.....	81
7.12	Emergency cover.....	83
7.13	Out-of-hours working .....	84
7.14	Rest periods and holiday .....	85
7.15	Practice staffing.....	86
7.16	Harassment and bullying .....	87
<b>8</b>	<b>Recently qualified vet nurses</b> .....	<b>90</b>
8.1	Respondent profile .....	90
8.2	First post-qualification post .....	91
8.3	Appraisals and performance reviews .....	92
8.4	Experience of veterinary nursing education .....	92
8.5	How well the course prepared vet nurses for their role .....	93
<b>9</b>	<b>Views about the veterinary nursing profession</b> .....	<b>95</b>
9.1	General views about the veterinary nursing profession.....	96
9.1.1	<i>Comparison to previous years</i> .....	96
9.1.2	<i>Views on working conditions</i> .....	97
9.1.3	<i>Views about scientific research and quality improvement</i> .....	99
9.1.4	<i>Views on veterinary standards and learning</i> .....	101
9.1.5	<i>Value and recognition</i> .....	103
9.2	General views about veterinary work.....	105

9.2.1	<i>Comparison to previous years</i>	105
9.2.2	<i>Delivering outcomes, using evidence, and clinical freedom</i>	106
9.2.3	<i>Improving practice</i>	108
9.2.4	<i>Support, delegation and remuneration</i>	109
9.2.5	<i>Able to be myself</i>	110
9.3	Reflections on career choice	111
9.4	Best things, challenges and improvements	113
9.4.1	<i>Best things about being a vet nurse</i>	113
9.4.2	<i>Challenges facing the profession</i>	114
9.4.3	<i>Improvements to the profession</i>	117
<b>10</b>	<b>Wellbeing</b>	<b>120</b>
10.1	Background to the WEMWBS	120
10.2	Response to WEMWBS	121
<b>11</b>	<b>Views about the RCVS</b>	<b>124</b>
11.1	Perceptions	125
11.2	Values	125
11.3	Contact and communications	126
11.4	RCVS Academy	127
11.5	Awareness of initiatives	127
11.6	Purpose	128
11.7	Overall views	130
11.8	Do more, do less?	130
11.8.1	<i>Do more</i>	131
11.8.2	<i>Do less</i>	132
11.9	Final thoughts	133
<b>12</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>135</b>
12.1	Context	135
12.2	Evidence of trends	135
12.3	Implications for the future	136
<b>Appendix</b>		<b>139</b>

## Executive Summary

---

This summary presents an overview of the 2024 Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession results, carried out on behalf of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). The survey yielded a 16% response rate (3,740 responses), including full and sufficiently completed partial questionnaires.

### Who are the vet nurses who responded?

Nearly all vet nurse respondents were female (95%), older than in previous surveys, at 37 years old, and nearly all were white (97%), as has been the case in previous surveys. Unlike earlier surveys, there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents who have a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. Two-thirds are in a relationship, with a third having child dependants and 7% having adult dependents – an increase from 3% a decade ago. A third had a mental or physical health condition or disability, which has increased through previous surveys. Two-thirds did not have any religious beliefs. Questions asked about social mobility showed a steady increase in the proportion of vet nurses who were eligible for free school meals and a steady decrease in those whose parents went to university, suggesting that the veterinary nursing profession has become more attainable over the last decade.

Around two-thirds qualified since 2010, with almost all (97%) qualifying in the UK. Similarly, nearly all (94%) resided in the UK before the age of 18. On the whole, few planned to study for any qualifications in the next five years in addition to those already held.

Almost all vet nurse respondents worked in the UK (98%) and are British citizens by birth (95%). Those who came to the UK came for better career opportunities, to work abroad or because they had friends or family in the UK. Two-thirds planned to stay indefinitely. Around 40% each worked in urban areas or a mix of urban and rural areas, with only 17% working in rural locations.

The mental wellbeing of the vet nurse workforce was poorer than that observed in the wider population, and has continued to worsen over the past decade. Younger vet nurse respondents, those with a disability or health condition, caring responsibilities, working in clinical practice, nurses or senior nurses and those working full time reported the lowest scores.

## What jobs do vet nurses have?

Almost all worked within the profession and 70% of vet nurse respondents were working full time, with a quarter working part time (mostly female respondents and carers), which has continued to increase over the past decade. As in previous surveys, working in small animal practice was most common and increased from 69% in 2019 to 75%. Mixed practice work has declined, from 18% in 2019 to 8% in 2024. Half of clinical practices have a dedicated out-of-hours provider and over a third working in clinical practice personally do out-of-hours work. A very small proportion of respondents were unemployed (0.5%) or retired (0.1%). A similarly small proportion (1.5%) were taking a career break due to illness, looking after children or deciding to change their work type or leave the profession.

Around a fifth of vet nurses (17%) had an additional job as well as their main vet nursing role. For two-thirds, this additional job was in the veterinary nursing profession or animal-related. The number of hours actually worked was higher than contracted hours, with an average of two additional hours. Equine practice vet nurses and educators had the highest average additional hours worked. Only 16% of vet nurse respondents worked on call, with two-fifths required to be awake. Again, those working in equine practice were the most likely to say they worked on call.

Nearly all (93%) respondents worked within clinical practice, with two-thirds working as part of a corporate group, increasing from 49% in 2019 to 62%, and one-third working in independent practices. Most (86%) worked in England. Over half (57%) worked as a nurse, followed by 29% working as a head, deputy or senior nurse – lower than in 2019. Only 13% worked as a locum and this was typically for financial reasons. The average full time equivalent number of staff at practices was 6.8 vets, 7.8 vet nurses and 2.2 student vet nurses.

Half of the vet nurse respondents' time in clinical practice was spent with dogs and a third with cats. Practice management and/or administration took around 14% of their time, followed by mentoring and training (10%) and people management (9%). Over half were providing support to student vet nurses, with one-third having previously provided such support. A quarter (27%) of vet nurse respondents were providing Extra Mural Studies (EMS) support for veterinary students. A high proportion (87%) did not carry out routine visits to clients (a small increase from 2019), with 90% working from their workplace premises and only 6% providing any remote services. Emergencies were typically attended to at the practice rather than away from it, with an average of 26 per month.

The most common tasks carried out by vet nurse respondents were injections, clinical cleaning and dispensing medication to clients. Four-fifths were involved in clinics that provided post-operative checks, nail clipping and vaccinations, with dental, geriatric/senior wellness and behaviour being the least common clinics for vet nurse respondents. The most common expertise offered to clients or employers was nail clipping, anal gland emptying and anaesthesia. Less regular tasks for vet nurse respondents were ultrasounds and providing nutritional advice.

In total, 940 respondents had qualified since 2021 and, as with the overall survey, the majority were female. Two-fifths of newly qualified vet nurses found a job after approaching just one practice, although 16% had to approach 10 or more practices before finding their first position.

As with previous years, a very small proportion (2%) worked outside the profession, where half worked in animal-related roles. However, since qualifying, nearly all indicated that they had worked in veterinary nursing (predominantly in clinical veterinary practice) at some stage of their career.

## How do they feel about their work?

Vet nurses found their work stressful but were satisfied with their job and felt they could be themselves in the workplace. They also felt that the workplace allowed them to deliver the best possible outcomes to their patients. However, they were not satisfied with their salary/remuneration level.

Vet nurses thought that clients valued the work of vets, but not the work of vet nurses. They were neutral on whether they were valued by the vet profession as a whole. Vet nurses were satisfied with the support given by others and felt comfortable reporting and sharing mistakes in the workplace, but less satisfied with the support given by their line manager.

Vet nurses were familiar with the concept of quality improvement and evidence-based medicine, but most have not participated in scientific research over the past five years. They were neutral about their ability to critically appraise a research study but actively used published evidence as part of their clinical decision-making. Vet nurses were somewhat positive that they could actively use quality improvement in their practice, exercise clinical freedom and that their vet colleagues delegated tasks appropriately under Schedule 3 to the Veterinary Surgeons Act.

Vet nurses did not think that the profession offered good opportunities for career progression or that the veterinary profession paid sufficient attention to the development of leadership skills. They also did not think that the veterinary profession paid enough attention to its environmental footprint or that it offered good opportunities to those wishing to work flexibly.

There were some differences in response patterns compared to vets. In particular, vets were notably more likely to have participated in scientific research and to believe that vet nurses were valued by the profession and by clients. Vets were somewhat more satisfied with support from their line managers compared to vet nurses and others in the workplace, and felt notably more able to exercise their clinical freedom.

Nearly half (42%) of vet nurse respondents would choose to work within the veterinary nursing profession if they had the opportunity to start their career again, with 29% each saying no or were uncertain, whereas in 2019, 51% would have made this career choice again.

The best things about working in the profession for vet nurses, as in 2019, were working with animals, making a difference and job satisfaction. On the other hand, poor financial reward and stress levels were felt to be the main challenges facing the veterinary nursing profession, alongside staff shortages, a newly introduced option for 2024 as this has been an issue raised in all surveys conducted by IES on behalf of the RCVS in the last five years.

Similarly to 2019, better financial rewards, more respect/recognition from the public, better work-life balance and better opportunities for career progression were the top things that vet nurses felt would improve the profession.

It is very important to note that just under half of respondents experienced harassment or bullying at work in the last year, two-fifths from clients and a fifth from colleagues. Male, gay/lesbian and bisexual vet nurses, those with caring responsibilities or health conditions, and those working in charities were more likely to report experiencing these behaviours.

## How do they feel about the RCVS?

Vet nurses respected the RCVS and felt that the organisation had a good international reputation, but they did not think registration provided good value for money or that the RCVS was in touch with the issues facing the profession. Vet nurses also felt that the RCVS upheld standards within the profession and was a positive force for animal health and welfare, but were negative about its support for vet nurse health and welfare. They felt that the RCVS was meeting its aspiration to be diverse and inclusive but fewer felt that it was compassionate. Of the 13% who had contacted the RCVS in the year before the survey, three-quarters felt the College staff had been professional and clear but, again, fewer felt they were compassionate. Overall, vet nurses rated the RCVS six out of ten, which is lower than 7.15 in 2019.

Half of vet nurse respondents overall were aware of the RCVS Academy, with two-fifths accessing it. Of this group, over half had accessed one or more courses. In terms of RCVS initiatives, most vet nurse respondents were aware of Mind Matters, whilst ViVet had the least awareness. However, engagement with the different RCVS initiatives was low, at around 10%, but this has increased since 2019.

## What does the future look like?

Vet nurses clearly enjoy working with animals, being able to make a difference and feeling supported by their colleagues. Despite the concerns that some respondents raised, 42% said they would choose veterinary nursing again and, reassuringly, 70% said they planned to stay in the profession for the next five years. Job satisfaction was high and showed vet nurses' passion for their job.

Vet nurse respondents felt better pay, more respect and recognition from the public, better work-life balance and better career progression opportunities would improve the

profession. A lack of feeling valued, by both vets and clients, was apparent throughout the survey.

Vet nurses would like the RCVS to do more to improve the status and recognition of vet nurses, to understand what it is like to work in the profession day-to-day, and to advocate for better pay and progression. They would like the RCVS to reduce what they felt were unclear and impractical regulations; instead, they requested more detailed, practical, less bureaucratic advice. In addition, they think the RCVS should do more to raise recognition and the status of vet nurses in the eyes of the public.

Increased stress and workload pressures have continued and appear to have been exacerbated by staff shortages. The low average Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMBWS) score for vet nurse respondents is concerning, with the average score continuing to decrease compared to previous years, reinforcing that the current focus on mental health is necessary but more could be implemented for vet nurses.

It is concerning that half of vet nurse respondents experienced harassment and/or bullying in the last year, suggesting that veterinary practices, in particular, may need to put more policies and processes in place to tackle client and colleague abuse.

More encouragingly, the majority of recent qualifiers were satisfied with the quality of training, the support they received during clinical placements and the quality of their college experiences, despite the majority of their training taking place during the Covid-19 pandemic. They felt that their education had provided them with 'knowledge and understanding' and 'professionalism and professional integrity', with two-thirds feeling that the curriculum had prepared them for work as a vet nurse.

It is also encouraging that 70% of all vet nurse respondents said they planned to stay in the profession for more than five years, with 5% planning to retire. However, the remaining 25% were planning to leave over the next five years for reasons other than retirement, and those working in clinical practice were more likely to plan to leave than those working in other settings. Retention of vet nurses should continue to be an important area for future work for the RCVS, especially considering current staff shortages.

Despite some worrying findings, vet nurses' high levels of job satisfaction were reflected in many of their additional comments, which showed a passion for, and belief in, the job, and some optimism about the future of the profession.

# 1 Introduction

---

## 1.1 Background

This report presents the results of the 2024 Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, carried out on behalf of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). The RCVS is the statutory regulator responsible under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 for keeping the Register of veterinary surgeons eligible to practise in the UK, setting standards for veterinary education and regulating the professional conduct of veterinary surgeons. It keeps a Register of Veterinary Nurses, and regulates their professional conduct, via its Royal Charter. A survey of veterinary surgeons (vets) was carried out alongside the veterinary nurse (vet nurse or VN) survey, and a companion report was produced that presents these findings.

The 2024 Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession is the sixth such survey carried out by IES on behalf of the RCVS since 2000. Registered vet nurses were identified to participate and, within this report, where appropriate results were compared with previous years. These surveys aim to provide the RCVS, and other interested parties, with an evidence-based view of the veterinary nursing profession and the changes taking place within it.

## 1.2 Survey process

The questionnaire was compiled by IES in collaboration with the RCVS using both questions from previous surveys and new questions and statements derived from discussions with RCVS stakeholders.

The survey was launched on 8 January 2024, following an informal questionnaire testing exercise. As with the previous two Surveys of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, the 2024 survey was conducted as an online survey only. A total of 23,082 registered vet nurses were invited to participate via email, for all of whom the RCVS held email addresses. A small number (59) of these addresses were no longer valid at the time of the survey, meaning that the total sample receiving an invitation to participate in the survey was 23,023. Four reminder emails were sent at intervals to encourage those who had not responded to participate in the survey.

In surveys before 2019, the vet nurse survey included student vet nurses; however, this has not been possible in the 2019 and 2024 surveys due to data protection issues.

## 1.3 Response

The survey was open for six weeks and received a total of 2,701 complete responses and 2,499 partial responses. Of the partial responses, 1,039 were sufficiently complete to be included, taking the final number of responses to 3,740. This provides a total response rate of 16%. This is considerably lower than previous surveys, when the 2019 survey achieved a response rate of 28% and both the 2014 and 2010 surveys secured a response rate of 31%. The inclusion of partial responses, however, resulted in an increased response rate for some questions. This was particularly notable for those questions nearer to the beginning of the questionnaire.

A response analysis was carried out to compare survey respondents to the RCVS database of vet nurses at the time the 2024 survey was launched. The results, presented in Table 1.1, indicate that, despite a degree of over- and under-representation of some groups, the 2024 survey sample generally reflected the make-up of vet nurses on the RCVS Register.

**Table 1.1: Veterinary nurse survey response analysis**

Gender	Age	Survey respondents %	RCVS database %	Over/under response
<b>Female</b>	Under 30	25.3	29.2	Under
	30s	33.9	38.6	Under
	40s	22.3	20.5	Slightly over
	50s and over	13.9	8.7	Slightly over
	<b>Total</b>	<b>95.4</b>	<b>97.0</b>	<b>Slightly under</b>
<b>Men</b>	Under 30	1.7	1.0	Slightly over
	30s	1.4	1.2	Similar
	40s	0.4	0.4	Same
	50s and over	0.3	0.1	Slightly over
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>Slightly over</b>

*RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

## 1.4 Data input and survey analysis

Survey responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was checked for outliers by examining the lowest and highest values. Where data points differed significantly from all other observations and were extremely high or low compared to the nearest data point, these were removed before analysis.

When carrying out analysis, IES used key variables to provide breakdowns to explore responses by gender, age, employment status, and area of work and also took account of any analysis undertaken for previous surveys. Where appropriate, some of these key variables for group comparisons were collapsed into one. For example, a variable indicating whether the respondent has a health condition and/or disability was created by combining the 'physical health' and the 'mental health' variables. Similarly, a variable

relating to providing care was created by combining the two variables on respondents' adult caring responsibilities and their responsibility for dependent children.

Chi-square testing was used to determine whether two categorical variables were associated with each other. Throughout the report, results from these analyses were only reported if statistically significant and if less than 20% of cells had an expected count that was lower than five. Independent sample t-tests were carried out to compare mean scores of the two groups.

Open-ended, free-text questions were analysed separately and grouped into thematic categories. Where response rates to open-ended and free-text questions were high, a sampling approach was used to explore a selection of qualitative responses (for example, where an open-text question received a response rate of over 1,000, 20% were selected at random for analysis). Quotes that were illustrative of the qualitative themes were selected for inclusion in the report.

As stated in the privacy notice that was shared with participants, any response options to demographic variables that were selected by fewer than three respondents have been removed for privacy.

## 1.5 Report structure

The report details the findings from the survey under the following headings, exploring trends over time where appropriate:

- Personal details
- Work status
- Work in the UK
- Work outside the Veterinary Nursing profession
- Work within the Veterinary Nursing profession
- Work in clinical practice
- New graduates
- Views about the profession
- Wellbeing
- Views about the RCVS
- Conclusions

## 2 Personal details

This chapter provides an overview of the characteristics of respondents to the 2024 vet nurse survey, including details on gender, age, ethnicity, responsibility for dependants, disabilities, indicators of social mobility, and qualifications before studying for their vet nurse qualification.

### Chapter summary

- The average age of respondents was higher than previous years at 37, and nearly all (95%) were female. The average age of female respondents was 37, while male respondents tended to be younger with a mean age of 33.
- There was an increase in the percentage of respondents describing themselves as other than heterosexual (14% compared to 5% in 2019).
- Nearly all (97%) respondents were white.
- Two-thirds (66%) were in a relationship and 4% were, at the time of the survey, pregnant or taking maternity/shared parental/adoption leave; a further 22% had previously been pregnant or taken maternity/shared parental/adoption leave. A third (35%) had child dependants (31%) and/or adult dependants (7%).
- 29% had a mental or physical health condition or disability.
- Two-thirds (68%) did not have any religious beliefs.
- 65% qualified from 2010 onwards.
- Almost all (94%) resided entirely or mostly in the UK before the age of 18, and 97% qualified in the UK.
- The percentage of respondents who obtained their vet nursing qualification via a degree, foundation degree or diploma (rather than an NVQ or certificate) has increased from 58% to 69% between 2019 and 2024.

### 2.1 Demographic characteristics

Table 2.1 shows the breakdown of respondents by gender, age, ethnicity and sexuality with comparisons to the 2019, 2014 and 2010 Surveys of the Veterinary Nursing Profession where possible. These are outlined in more detail below.

**Table 2.1: Demographic characteristics of respondents to the 2024 survey, compared with 2019, 2014 and 2010**

		2024 frequency	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %	2010 %
<b>Gender</b>	Male	95	3.5	2.7	2.4	2
	Female	2545	95.0	96.8	97.5	98
	Non-binary	4	0.1	-	-	-
	Gender fluid	*	*	-	-	-
	Prefer to self-describe	*	*	0.1	-	-
	Prefer not to say	34	1.3	0.4	0.1	-
<b>Age</b>	Under 30	617	27.3	32.4	53.4	50.8
	30 to 39	806	35.7	38.3	29.4	33.9
	40 to 49	515	22.8	20.1	12.5	11
	50 to 59	258	11.4	7.4	4.1	4
	60 and over	64	2.8	1.3	0.7	0.4
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	2,567	96.5	97.6	98.3	98.8
	Mixed	32	1.2	1.1	0.9	0.7
	Asian/Asian British	16	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.1
	Black/Black British	5	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2
	Other	5	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1
	Prefer to self-describe	3	0.1	-	-	-
	Prefer not to say	31	1.2	0.5	-	-
<b>Sexuality</b>	Heterosexual	2,116	79.7	92.3	-	-
	Bi/Bisexual	151	5.7	2.7	-	-
	Gay or lesbian	90	3.4	2.1	-	-
	Queer	10	0.4	-	-	-
	Pansexual	20	0.8	-	-	-
	Asexual	110	4.1	-	-	-
	Prefer to self-describe	3	0.1	0.3	-	-
	Don't know	16	0.6	-	-	-
	Prefer not to say	139	5.2	2.5	-	-
<b>Religion</b>	Buddhist	4	0.2	-	-	-
	Christian	659	24.9	-	-	-
	Hindu	3	0.1	-	-	-
	Jewish	8	0.3	-	-	-
	Muslim	3	0.1	-	-	-
	Any other religion	33	1.2	-	-	-
	Prefer to self-describe	18	0.7	-	-	-
	No religion	1,799	68.0	-	-	-
	Prefer not to say	116	4.4	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\*\* Denotes fewer than 3 responses to this category.

‘-’ Denotes no comparison available for this data.

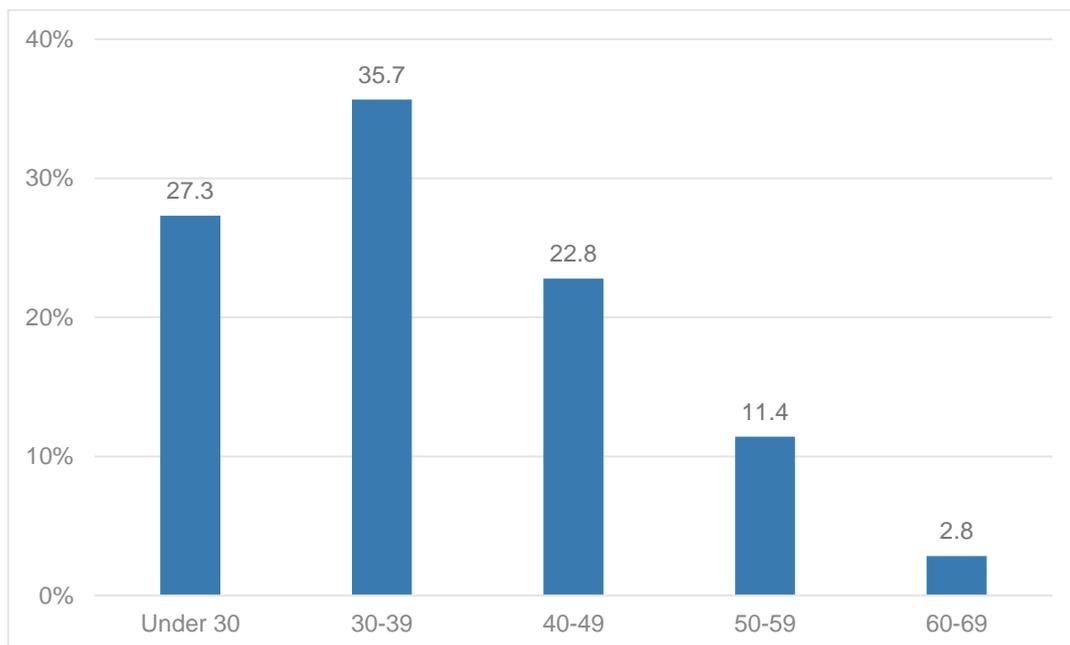
Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 2.1.1 Age

The mean age of respondents to the survey was 37, higher than in previous years. This is likely to be mainly due to student vet nurses not being included in the 2024 survey sample. There were, however, increases across the highest three age categories. While this might appear to indicate that the veterinary nursing workforce overall is getting older, comparison with RCVS registration data shown in Table 1.1 shows that younger vet nurses were underrepresented in the sample, skewing this finding. The mean age of female respondents was 37, higher than the mean age of male respondents which was 33.

Figure 2.1 shows the age distribution of vet nurses who responded to this survey. From this, it is evident that while the profession might be getting older, the majority (63%) of vet nurses were aged 39 and under. In 2019, 71% of respondents were within this group.

**Figure 2.1: Age distribution of the veterinary nursing profession**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 2.1.2 Gender

Similar to previous surveys of the veterinary nursing profession, nearly all (95%) respondents were female, while around 4% were male. A further 1% selected that they preferred not to say. Two new gender identity options were added to the 2024 survey, non-binary and gender fluid, which were each selected by few respondents.



Table 2.1 shows that:

- While the gender breakdown is similar to previous years, the trend of slightly increasing male respondents and corresponding slightly decreasing female respondents carried on in this survey.
- There was a notable increase in respondents not wishing to disclose their gender (over 1%).

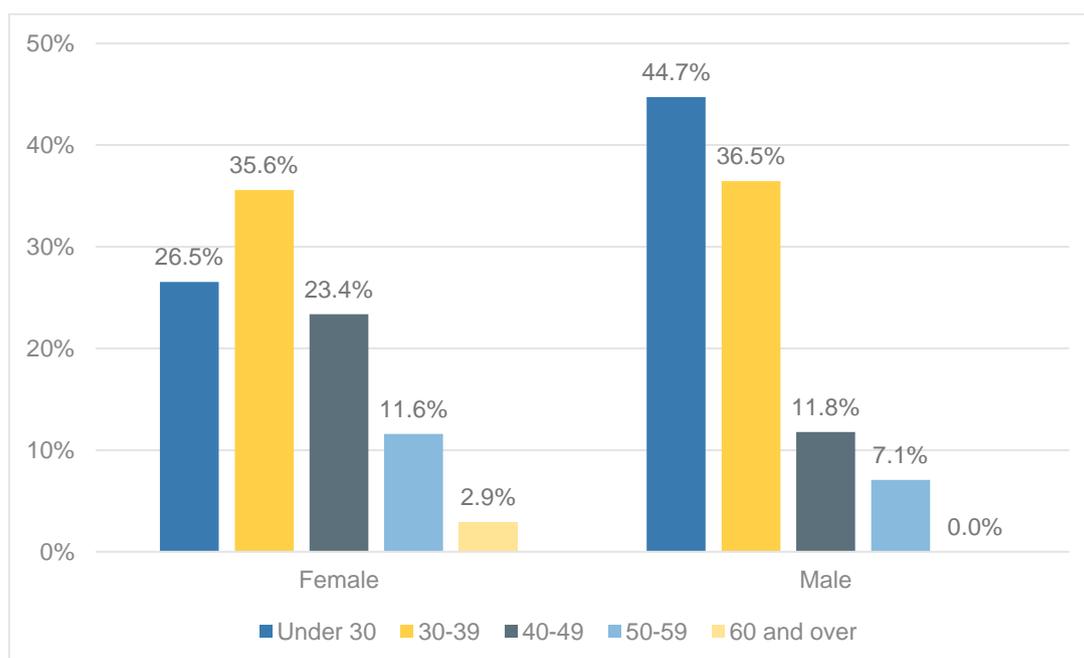
As the proportion of male respondents was so low, comparisons by gender have not been reported throughout; where significant differences by gender did occur, however, these have been reported.

Following its addition in the 2019 survey, 99% of respondents said their gender identity was the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. A small sample (<1%) said their gender identity was not the same, and a further 1% did not wish to disclose. Given this small sample of individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth, robust analysis by this characteristic was not possible.

### 2.1.3 Age by gender

When exploring the relationship between age and gender of respondents, it was evident that male vet nurses tended to be younger than their female counterparts. Over 80% of male respondents were aged 39 and under, while 61% of females were in this age range. A summary of respondents' age by gender is displayed in Figure 2.2. Due to the small number of respondents reporting genders other than 'male' and 'female', only male and female genders are included in this figure.

**Figure 2.2: Respondents' age by gender (male and female only)**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 2.1.4 Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation was included as a question for the first time in the 2019 Surveys of the Profession. In 2024 an additional four options were included: queer, pansexual, asexual and don't know. Further, 'gay woman/lesbian' and 'gay man' were collapsed into one category, 'gay or lesbian'.

Table 2.1 shows that:

- Around 80% of respondents reported that they were heterosexual, a decrease from 92% in 2019.
- Around 6% reported that they were bi or bisexual, an increase from 3% in 2019, and 3% indicated they were either gay or lesbian, an increase from 2% in 2019.
- 4% said they were asexual and around 1% of respondents selected each 'pansexual' and 'don't know'.
- A small proportion (fewer than 1%) reported that they were queer, or they preferred to self-describe.
- Finally, around 5% indicated they did not wish to disclose, an increase from 2% in 2019.

### 2.1.5 Ethnicity

As in previous years, almost all (97%) respondents to the survey were white. Table 2.1 shows there was an increase in the proportion of people who wished not to disclose their ethnicity compared to the 2019 survey (1.2% compared to 0.5%). Of the very small number who chose other or preferred to self-describe, descriptions included Chinese, Cornish, Latin American and Middle Eastern.

## 2.2 Relationship status

The relationship status of respondents was largely split between three main categories; married (39%), single (25%) and cohabiting (23%). A small proportion of respondents preferred to self-describe their relationship status, and most of these indicated they were either in a long-term relationship or engaged. A full breakdown is displayed in

Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2: Relationship status of survey respondents**

	2024 N	2024 %
Married	1,029	38.5
Single	678	25.4
Co-habiting	608	22.8
In a civil partnership	122	4.6
Divorced	66	2.5
Separated (but still legally married/in a civil partnership)	27	1.0
Widowed	11	0.4
Dissolved civil partnership	*	*
Prefer to self-describe	28	1.0
Prefer not to say	99	3.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,668</b>	<b>99.9</b>

*\*\* Denotes fewer than three responses to this category.*

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 2.3 Pregnancy and parental leave

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents said they were not currently or had not previously been, pregnant, on maternity/paternity leave, or shared parental or adoption leave (pregnancy or parental leave) whilst working in the veterinary nursing profession; 4% indicated they currently were, and 23% had previously been. A full breakdown of responses is displayed in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Pregnancy and parental leave status of survey respondents**

	2024 N	2024 %
Previously pregnant or taken maternity/shared parental/adoption leave	552	20.8
Currently pregnant or taking maternity/shared parental/adoption leave	96	3.6
Previously taken paternity/shared parental/adoption leave	26	1.0
Prefer not to say	29	1.1
None of the above	1,953	73.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2656</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 2.4 Responsibility for dependants

Over one-third (35%) indicated they had dependent children or provided care to an adult dependant. A total of 31% of respondents said they had dependent children, which is

slightly lower than in 2019 (35%). Participants who had dependent children indicated the age(s) of their children and this is displayed in Table 2.4 with comparison to 2019 data.

**Table 2.4: Age categories of dependent children, with comparison to 2019 survey**

	2024 %	2019 %
0-4	39.8	48.8
5-11	45.9	46.7
12-18	34.5	25.2
Over 18	12.6	7.6

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

A much smaller proportion of respondents (7%) indicated they provided care to an adult dependant. Despite being low, this is a notable increase on previous years. A comparison between years is displayed in Table 2.5.

**Table 2.5: Proportion of respondents providing care for adult dependants, with comparison to 2019 and 2014 surveys**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Yes	179	6.6	3.3	2.6
No	2,435	93.2	96.7	27.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,614</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

## 2.5 Health conditions and disabilities (physical and mental)

Overall, 29% of respondents indicated that they had a mental or physical health condition or disability that has a substantial and long-term effect on their everyday activities. Within this, 16% said their health condition was physical in nature, and 20% said their health condition or disability was related to their mental health.

**Table 2.6: Respondents who have a health condition that has substantial and long-term effects on their everyday activities**

	2024 N	2024 %
Has a health condition/disability	749	29.3
Does not have a health condition/disability	1,804	70.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,553</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 2.6 RCVS status

Almost all respondents were registered vet nurses, with fewer than 1% being in a Period of Supervised Practice (PSP). This was consistent with the 2019 survey.

## 2.7 Veterinary nursing qualification

### 2.7.1 Year of qualification

The largest proportion of respondents (36%) to this survey qualified between 2010 and 2019. This was closely followed by vet nurses who qualified after 2020 (29%). The median year (the year by which half of survey respondents had qualified) was 2010, while the modal (most frequent) year was 2023. A full breakdown of responses by decade is displayed in Table 2.7.

**Table 2.7: Year of qualification by decade**

	2024 N	2024 %
2020 - current	1,083	29.0
2010 – 2019	1,328	35.5
2000 – 2009	800	21.4
1990 – 1999	382	10.2
1980 – 1989	128	3.4
1970 – 1979	19	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,740</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

### 2.7.2 Qualification country

Almost all respondents (94%) indicated that until the age of 18, they resided entirely or mostly in the UK. Similarly, most respondents (97%) achieved their vet nursing qualification in the UK, and a further 1% in the Republic of Ireland. A full breakdown of qualification countries is displayed in

Table 2.8.

**Table 2.8: Country of qualification**

	<b>2024 N</b>	<b>2024 %</b>
UK	3,637	97.2
Republic of Ireland	33	0.9
Other EU/EEA/EFTA country	19	0.5
Australia	16	0.4
South Africa	12	0.3
New Zealand	7	0.2
USA	4	0.1
Europe outside EU/EEA/EFTA	3	0.1
Canada	3	0.1
Other	5	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,739</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Of those qualifying in EU/EEA/EFTA countries other than the Republic of Ireland, the most qualified in Portugal (58%), followed by Poland and Italy (each with 11%).

### 2.7.3 Primary qualification

Nearly half of respondents (45%) held a Level 3 Diploma as their primary veterinary nursing qualification, a slight increase from 2019. Similarly, the proportion of vet nurses holding a degree has increased. A full breakdown of veterinary nursing qualifications is presented in Table 2.9.

**Table 2.9: Qualifications held by respondents**

	<b>2024 N</b>	<b>2024 %</b>	<b>2019 %</b>	<b>2014 %</b>
Level 3 Diploma	1,671	44.8	40.8	34
Degree	579	15.5	10.7	13.3
NVQ	573	15.4	23.8	28
Certificate (pre-2000)	534	14.3	15.8	15.8
Foundation degree	305	8.2	6.7	6.9
Other	67	1.8	2.2	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,740</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 2.7.4 Qualification prior to veterinary nursing studies

Over half (58%) of respondents had at least five GCSEs (or equivalent) prior to their veterinary nursing training, and a further third (32%) had 2 or more A Levels or equivalent.

These are both increases on 2019 data. A full breakdown of veterinary nursing qualifications before training is displayed in Table 2.10.

**Table 2.10: Qualifications held by vet nurses prior to veterinary nursing training, with comparison to 2019 data**

	Number with the qualification (2024)	% with the qualification (2024)	% with the qualification (2019)
5+ O levels (passes)/CSEs (grade 1)/GCSEs (grades A* to C), School Certificate, 1 A Level/2 to 3 AS Levels/VCEs, Higher Diploma, Intermediate Apprenticeship	2,156	57.9	43.5
2+ A Levels/VCEs, 4+ AS Levels, Higher School Certificate, Progression/Advanced Diploma, 4+ Scottish Highers	1,200	32.2	27.1
1 to 4 O levels/CSEs/GCSEs (any grades), Entry Level, Foundation Diploma	1,088	29.2	40.9
NVQ Level 3, Advanced GNVQ, City and Guilds Advanced Craft, ONC, OND, BTEC National, RSA Advanced Diploma	577	15.5	14.1
Undergraduate degree (eg BA, BSc)	512	13.7	10.4
NVQ Level 2, Intermediate GNVQ, City & Guilds Craft, BTEC First/General Diploma, RSA Diploma	491	13.2	15.8
NVQ Level 1, Foundation GNVQ, Basic Skills	209	5.6	20.8
Other vocational/work-related qualifications	195	5.2	5.0
Non-UK qualifications	152	4.1	0.3
NVQ Level 4-5, NHC, NHD, RSA Higher Diploma, BTEC Higher Level, Higher Apprenticeship	142	3.8	3.1
Apprenticeship	96	2.6	2.7
Master's degree (eg MA, MSc)	40	1.1	0.4
Professional qualifications (eg teaching, nursing, accountancy)	53	1.4	1.2
Doctorate degree (eg PhD)	4	0.1	0.1
No qualifications	15	0.4	0.6

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024 and 2019

## 2.8 Social mobility

As in the previous two Surveys of the Veterinary Nursing Profession in 2019 and 2014, respondents who said they entirely or mostly resided in the UK up until the age of 18 were asked a series of government-endorsed questions used to identify the accessibility of a profession.

### 2.8.1 Occupation of main household earner

The largest proportion (29%) said the occupation of their main household earner, when they were aged around 14 years old, was categorised under ‘modern professional and traditional profession occupations’. Table 2.11 displays a full breakdown of main household earner occupations.

**Table 2.11: Occupation of main household earner, when respondent was aged about 14**

	2024 N	2024 %
Modern professional and traditional professional occupations	982	28.8
Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations	631	18.5
Technical and craft occupations	599	17.6
Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators	535	15.7
Clerical and intermediate occupations	255	7.5
Small business owners who employed fewer than 25 people	229	6.7
Long-term unemployed (more than one year)	68	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,404</b>	<b>100</b>

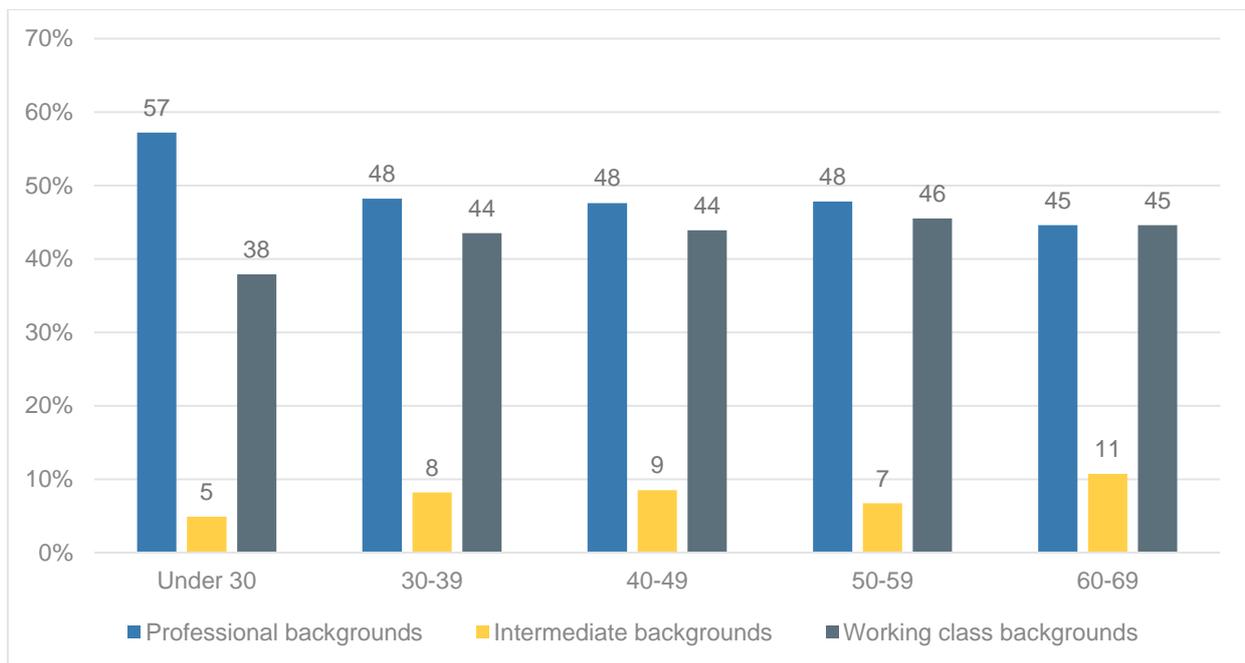
Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

In order to conduct analysis by participant demographics, the professions listed in Table 2.11 were collapsed into professional backgrounds, intermediate backgrounds, and working-class backgrounds, following guidance from the Social Mobility Commission<sup>1</sup>.

Generally, a low percentage of respondents across all age categories indicated that the main occupation in their household was of an intermediate background; professional or working-class backgrounds were notably more frequent. It is also apparent that younger vet nurses were more likely than those in older age groups to say the occupation of the main earner was professional. Results are displayed in Figure 2.3.

<sup>1</sup> Social Mobility Commission - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/socio-economic-diversity-and-inclusion-employers-toolkit/employers-toolkit#socio-economic>

**Figure 2.3: Occupation of main household earner when respondent was aged about 14, by respondent age now**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 2.8.2 Schooling

Almost all (93%) attended a state-run or state-funded school between the ages of 11 and 16, which was similar to 2019; 6% attended independent or fee-paying schools, a slight increase from the 2019 surveys, but slightly lower than what is observed nationally, where 7.5% of the total population attends independent or fee-paying schools in the UK. Data on schooling is displayed in Table 2.12.

**Table 2.12: Type of school attended between the ages of 11 and 16 with comparison to 2019 and 2014 data**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
A state-run or state-funded	3,258	93.2	93.5	87.8
Independent or fee-paying school	193	5.5	5.2	5.9
Attended school outside the UK	10	0.3	0.4	4.2
Other/don't know/prefer not to say	36	1.1	0.9	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,461</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

### 2.8.3 Eligibility for free school meals

Respondents who finished school post-1980 were asked whether they were eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point during their school years. Around one-fifth (21%)

indicated that they had been eligible, an increase on both 2019 and 2014 data. This is higher than national observations, which indicate that 15% of the population was eligible.

Consistent increases in the proportion of respondents who were eligible for FSM could indicate that the profession is becoming more accessible for individuals growing up in low-income households. Table 2.13 displays survey results for the past decade.

**Table 2.13: Eligibility for FSM at any point during school years with comparison to 2019 and 2014 surveys**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Yes	695	20.8	17.5	13.3
No	2,089	55.9	75.0	82.6
Don't know/prefer not to say	564	16.8	7.5	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,784</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

Table 2.14 shows that a significantly higher proportion of respondents aged 30-39 were eligible for FSM, while those aged 40-49 had the lowest proportion who were eligible. As this question was only applicable to those who attended school after 1980, there were few responses from those aged 60+ so these have been removed from this analysis.

**Table 2.14: Eligibility for FSM by age**

	% of respondents			
	Under 30	30 – 39	40 – 49	50 – 59
Eligible for FSM	25.4	28.0	20.1	25.0
Not eligible for FSM	74.6	72.0	79.9	75.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Additionally, analysis indicated a significant difference between those with disabilities and health conditions and those without, with almost a third (31%) of those with physical or mental health conditions having been eligible for FSM, compared with around a quarter (25%) of those without a physical or mental health condition.

#### 2.8.4 Parents' or guardians' level of education

75% said that their parents or guardians did not attend university, while 21% said that at least one parent or guardian had done so; these figures are largely equivalent to the 2019 survey. National data suggests that 49% of the population grew up in a household where at least one parent or guardian attended university or achieved a degree.

Despite this, as outlined in 2019, a report published by the Social Mobility Commission in 2017 indicated that 61% of human nurses come from non-professional or non-managerial

families<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, it can be inferred that the veterinary nursing profession is as accessible as the human nursing profession. A full breakdown of results, with comparison to 2019 and 2014 data, is displayed in Table 2.15.

**Table 2.15: Parental university attendance and degree attainment before the respondent reached 18 with comparison to 2019 and 2014 data**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Yes	728	20.8	21.3	22.2
No	2,633	75.3	74.9	73.6
Don't know/prefer not to say	136	3.9	3.8	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,497</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

Respondents in younger age categories were significantly more likely to report that at least one of their parents or guardians had attended university and gained a degree by the time they were 18. This data is displayed in Table 2.16.

**Table 2.16: Parental university attendance and degree attainment before the respondent reached 18 by age**

	% of respondents				
	Under 30	30 – 39	40 – 49	50 – 59	60+
Parent or guardian(s) attended university	29.2	25.0	15.0	15.7	10.2
Parent or guardian(s) did not attend university	70.8	75.0	85.0	84.3	89.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

<sup>2</sup> Friedman S, Laurison D, Macmillan C (2017). *Social Mobility, the Class Pay Gap and Intergenerational Worklessness: New Insights from the Labour Force Survey*. Social Mobility Commission.

## 3 Work status

This chapter provides an overview of respondents' current employment and work status, including those who were currently unemployed, taking a career break, considering leaving the profession or recently retired.

### Chapter summary

- Over two-thirds (70%) worked full time, which is consistent with previous surveys. More female respondents and carers worked part time.
- 16 months was the average period of unemployment for the 0.5% of unemployed respondents, but this ranged from one month to over five years.
- A small proportion (1.5%) were taking a career break. The main reasons were deciding to leave the profession or change work type, illness or looking after child dependants.
- The main reasons given by those considering leaving were not feeling valued, pay, chronic stress and dissatisfaction with career opportunities.
- Five respondents had retired, mostly in the last year.

### 3.1 Employment status

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their employment status at the time of completing their survey. Table 3.1 shows that around 70% of respondents were working full time and over a quarter (27%) were working part time. Results were largely similar to 2019 data.

**Table 3.1: Main current employment category**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Full time work	2,612	69.8	70.5	73.5
Part time work	1,042	27.9	27.1	20.9
Taking a career break	57	1.5	1.5	1.8
Unemployed	17	0.5	0.5	3.1
Voluntary work	7	0.2	0.2	0.5
Retired	5	0.1	0.1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,740</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

Due to low response numbers to categories other than 'full time work' and 'part time work', analysis by respondent demographics focused only on these two response options. Analysis by sub-group shows that:

- Males in the profession were more likely to be working full time, with around 93% working in this way compared to 70% of females.
- There was a clear reduction in the proportion of people working full time as respondents moved into older age categories, with around 89% of people under 30 working full time compared with just 32% of those over 60.
- Individuals with caring responsibilities were much more likely to be working part time than those without, with 53% and 16% of these groups, respectively, working part time.

## 3.2 Unemployment

The mean number of months unemployed was 16, however this ranged from 1 to 64 months. The median number of months was 3. Overall:

- 59% said that they were not currently seeking work.
- Of those seeking work, just two indicated they were seeking work in veterinary nursing.
- Over one-third (38%) had been unemployed for fewer than four months.
- Over half (56%) had been unemployed for under 12 months.

## 3.3 Career breaks

A small proportion (2%) of respondents said that they were taking a career break.

Table 3.2 shows that within this:

- Over a third (37%) were deciding to leave the profession or change the type of work they do.
- 14% were taking parental leave or looking after children, a much lower proportion than in previous years.
- 18% were ill and unable to work.

A small percentage of respondents selected that they were leaving the profession for 'other' reasons. These included considering early retirement, looking after elderly pets and frustration with corporate takeover of a practice.

**Table 3.2: Main purpose of career breaks**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Deciding whether to leave the profession/change work type	21	36.8	-	-
Illness (self)	10	17.5	16.5	6
Parental leave/looking after children	8	14.0	41.3	45.2
Travel	6	10.5	11.9	15.5
Leaving the profession	3	5.3	-	-
Study	*	*	6.4	14.3
Sabbatical	*	*	4.6	4.8
Looking after an adult dependant	*	*	2.8	1.2
Other	5	8.8	16.5	13.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

‘\*’ Denotes fewer than three responses to this category.

‘-’ Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

The average estimate of how long they expected their break to last was 24 months, while the median was 12. Responses, however, ranged from 2 to 200 months<sup>3</sup>. In more detail:

- Around one-third expected their career break to last up to 12 months, and a further fifth said they expect their career break to be 12 months long.
- Three-fifths (60%) said their career break would be between 12 and 60 months long.

### 3.4 Leaving the profession

A total of 21 individuals said they were deciding whether to leave the profession or change their work type. Table 3.3 shows that:

- The most common reason for considering leaving was due to not feeling rewarded or valued, non-financially, which was selected by over three-quarters (76%) of respondents.
- This was closely followed by pay, which one-third (67%) of respondents selected as a reason they were considering leaving the profession.
- Chronic stress was another common reason for considering leaving the profession (62%).

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that there are different register categories for vet nurses than there are for vets, where there is no register category for non-practising vet nurses whilst this is possible for vets, meaning that these numbers are not comparable.

- Other common reasons included dissatisfaction with career opportunities, workplace culture, poor work-life balance, mental health issues and lack of support from management.

**Table 3.3 Why respondents are deciding whether to leave the profession or change their work type**

	2024 N	2024 %
Not feeling rewarded or valued (non-financial)	16	76.2
Pay	14	66.7
Chronic stress	13	61.9
Dissatisfaction with career opportunities	12	57.1
Workplace culture	11	52.4
Poor work-life balance	9	42.9
Health issues (mental)	9	42.9
Lack of support from management	9	42.9
Lack of flexibility in hours	7	33.3
Unfulfilling work	7	33.3
Bullying and unfair treatment	6	28.6
Career change/new challenge	5	23.8
Long/unsocial hours	5	23.8
Burden of bureaucracy/legislation	5	23.8
Health issues (physical)	5	23.8
Lack of adjustments/support for mental health issues	5	23.8
Care of dependants/to have family	4	19.0
Career break	4	19.0
Leadership practices	3	14.3
Lack of adjustments/support for physical health issues	2	9.5
Study	1	4.8
Travel	1	4.8
Discrimination, victimisation or harassment	1	4.8
Lack of adjustments/support for disclosed neurodivergent condition	1	4.8
Other	1	4.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

One respondent indicated they were planning to leave due to discrimination, victimisation or harassment. This individual was asked to select the subject of their discrimination, which they confirmed to be a disability. Similarly, the six respondents who indicated they were planning to leave due to bullying and unfair treatment were asked to explain the unfair treatment they had experienced. These included:

- Conflict with management

- Unfair pay
- Being given unsustainable workloads
- Hearing other vet nurses negatively talking about them and being excluded from social events

Further questions around bullying and harassment more generally are explored in chapter 7.14.

## **3.5 Retirement**

The five individuals who had retired have all retired since 2012. Within these, the modal year was 2023.

## 4 Work in the UK

---

This chapter reports the results of the questions on work location and citizenship, including gaining a better understanding of those who have moved to the UK to work in the veterinary nursing profession.

### Chapter summary

- Almost all (98%) were working entirely or mainly in the UK.
- Most (95%) said they were British citizens by birth.
- The main reasons for coming to the UK were better career opportunities in the UK, being able to work abroad, and because of their parents/family in the UK. However, several of the more important reasons in 2019 decreased significantly in popularity, notably better career opportunities, to gain experience, better pay/conditions, a better attitude toward animals, and veterinary work having a higher status in the UK.
- The majority (59%) were planning to stay indefinitely.

### 4.1 Country of employment

Almost all respondents (98%) said that they worked entirely or mainly in the UK or the Republic of Ireland, largely similar to findings from 2019.

Table 4.1 shows that of the 2% working outside the UK:

- The highest number worked in Australia.
- A handful of respondents were working in EU, EEA and/or EFTA countries.
- A small number were working in New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, Hong Kong and the USA.

**Table 4.1: Country worked in, or mainly worked in, if more than one**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
UK/Republic of Ireland	3,582	98.3	97.6	98.7
Australia	17	0.5	0.8	0.5
Other EU/EEA/EFTA country	10	0.3	0.4	0.1
New Zealand	4	0.1	0.2	0.1
Canada	3	0.1	0.1	0.1
South Africa	5	0.1	0.1	0.1
Hong Kong	3	0.1	-	-
USA	3	0.1	0.1	0
Europe outside EU/EEA/EFTA	*	*	0	0.1
Other	15	0.4	0.7	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3642</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Denotes fewer than three responses to this category.

'-' Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

The 15 respondents who selected that they were working in countries other than those listed were asked to indicate where they were working. Locations included the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, France, Qatar, Bulgaria, the Cayman Islands and the British Virgin Islands.

## 4.2 Citizenship

In a question new to the 2024 survey, most respondents (95%) shared that they were British citizens by birth. Of those who were not,

Table 4.2 shows that:

- Nearly two-fifths (38%) had indefinite leave to remain in the UK.
- One-fifth (22%) became a British citizen after birth, and a further fifth (21%) were citizens of the Republic of Ireland.
- Others were in the process of applying for, or intending to apply for, indefinite leave to remain (6%) or were applying for, or intending to apply for, British citizenship (3%).

**Table 4.2: Citizenship status**

	2024 N	2024 %
Have indefinite leave to remain in the UK	67	37.9
Became a British citizen after birth	38	21.5
Citizen of the Republic of Ireland	37	20.9
Applying or intending to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK	10	5.6
Other	10	5.6
Applying or intend to apply for British citizenship	6	3.4
Have a different type of British nationality	5	2.8
Not intending to apply for British citizenship or indefinite leave to remain	4	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Around 6% of respondents selected 'other' as their citizenship status. When asked for more detail, responses included holding a skilled worker visa, British citizenship by descent, pre-settlement or settlement status, or unsure about their future in the UK.

## 4.3 Moving to the UK

### 4.3.1 Motivations for moving

Table 4.3 shows that the top three reasons people chose to move to the UK were:

- Better career opportunities in the UK.
- To be able to work abroad.
- Parents or family moved to the UK.

Comparisons to previous years, also displayed in Table 4.3, generally show a decline across all reasons for moving to the UK. Notably:

- People moving to the UK for better career opportunities fell from 50% in 2019 to 28% in 2024.
- 39% of respondents in 2019 said they moved as veterinary work has a higher status in the UK; however, this fell to 18% in 2024.
- There was a decline in the number of people moving to the UK in the belief there are better attitudes toward animals here, falling from 32% in 2019 to 11% in 2024.

Only two reasons saw small increases in responses in the 2024 survey. These were:

- Friends or family in the UK, rising from 10% in 2019 to 13% in 2024.
- Remained in the UK after studying, rising from 14% in 2019 to 15% in 2024.

**Table 4.3: Reasons for coming to the UK**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Better career opportunities	49	28.3	49.6	-
To work abroad	47	27.2	34.5	29.1
Parents/family moved to the UK	39	22.5	-	-
To gain experience	38	22.0	40.8	23.6
To study/obtain a further qualification	38	22.0	24.0	30.9
Marriage/partner	36	20.8	23.2	28.2
Better pay and conditions	34	19.7	36.8	13.6
Veterinary work has higher status in the UK	31	17.9	39.2	-
Lack of work in home country	27	15.6	22.4	20.9
Stayed here after studying	25	14.5	13.6	10
Family/friends in the UK	22	12.7	9.6	-
Better attitude to animals in the UK	19	11.0	32.0	-
I like British culture	13	7.5	14.4	-
To learn English	12	6.9	11.2	11.8
I like British people	6	3.5	10.4	-
Other	15	8.7	11.2	13.6

*‘-’ Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014*

Other free-text responses included being able to travel, for safety, working and living on different sides of the Northern Irish/Irish border, and improving mental health.

Respondents indicated that they moved to the UK between 1979 and 2024, with the modal year being 2016.

### 4.3.2 Intentions to remain

The majority (59%) said they were planning to stay indefinitely and a further quarter (23%) said they were unsure or did not know how long they would remain in the UK<sup>4</sup> (

<sup>4</sup> Due to the spread of responses across categories, it was not possible to confidently understand how response varies by demographic and qualification details.

Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4: Intended length of stay in the UK**

	<b>2024 N</b>	<b>2024 %</b>
Less than a year	1	0.6
1 or 2 years	8	4.7
3 to 5 years	7	4.1
More than 5 years but not indefinitely	15	8.7
Indefinitely	101	58.7
Don't know/unsure	40	23.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

## 5 Work outside the profession

This chapter focuses on respondents working outside the veterinary nursing profession: understanding what type of work they were currently doing, whether they had ever worked in the profession, and any intention to re-enter the profession.

### Chapter summary

- Similar to previous years, just 2% of respondents were working entirely outside the profession.
- Of these, 57% were working in animal-related roles.
- Nearly all (95%) indicated that they had worked within veterinary nursing at some point since graduating; three-fifths of these had worked in the profession for 10 years or longer.
- Nearly all (96%) had worked in clinical veterinary practice, although some had held other roles such as in academia and charities.
- The most commonly cited reasons for leaving the profession included burnout, low pay, poor progression opportunities, poor work-life balance and a lack of respect for vet nurses.
- Just 23% said they intended to return to the profession, either within the next year or longer term.

### 5.1 Summary of those working outside the veterinary nursing profession

Similar to previous years, just 2% of respondents were working entirely outside the veterinary nursing profession. This could be because many vet nurses who leave the profession do not keep up their RCVS registration, and also because there is not a non-practising category of membership for vet nurses. Of the relatively small number working outside the profession:

- 98% were female.
- The largest proportion (32%) were aged 30-39, followed closely by those aged 40-49 (30%).
- 97% had qualified in the UK.

Due to the small number of those working outside the profession, it was not possible to conduct robust sub-group analysis in further sections of this chapter.

## 5.2 Type of work

In their work outside the veterinary nursing profession, a slightly higher proportion (57%) were working in animal-related roles compared to non-animal-related roles. Table 5.1 provides an outline of the varying nature of the roles of individuals working outside the veterinary nursing profession. In comparison to 2019 and 2014 data, there have generally been increases across all professions. The largest increases have been in:

- Administrative and support service activities, rising from 12% in 2019 to 20% in 2024.
- Professional scientific and technical activities, rising year on year from 12% in 2014 to around 18% in each of 2019 and 2024.
- Financial and insurance activities, rising from 3% to 8% between 2019 and 2024.

Three categories saw a decline in the number of responses. These were:

- Education, falling very slightly from 18% in both 2014 and 2019 to 17% in 2024.
- Other service activities, falling year on year from 13% in 2014 and 12% in 2019 to 7% in 2024.
- Respondents reported they were unsure of the nature of their work, falling from 10% in 2019 to 8% in 2019.

**Table 5.1 Nature of work outside the profession**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Administrative and support service activities	15	19.5	11.8	-
Professional, scientific and technical activities	14	18.2	17.1	11.8
Education	13	16.9	17.9	17.6
Human health and social work activities	9	11.7	10.7	9.0
Agriculture, forestry and fishing (includes animal farming)	7	9.1	8.6	5.1
Financial and insurance activities	6	7.8	2.9	3.9
Other service activities	5	6.5	12.1	12.6
Categories with fewer than three responses	13	16.9	4.8	2.4
Don't know	6	7.8	10	-

'-' Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Note: The N and % of respondents in 'Categories with fewer than three responses' is not directly comparable year on year as the categories included in this change depending on annual response rates.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) indicated their role was in the private sector, while a further 29% said they were working in the public sector. A further 11% were working in the third sector (charities, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations).

## 5.3 Ever worked in the profession?

### 5.3.1 Length of time in the profession

Of the 73 respondents who were working outside the profession, 95% indicated that they had worked within Veterinary Nursing at some point since graduating. Table 5.2 shows that:

- Three-fifths (60%) had worked in the veterinary nursing profession for 10 years or longer.
- One-third (34%) had worked in the profession for between three and nine years.
- Around 5% had worked in the profession for two years or less.

**Table 5.2: Length of time working in the veterinary nursing profession**

	N	%
Less than a year	2	2.7
One or two years	2	2.7
Three or four years	11	15.1
Five to nine years	14	19.2
10 to 19 years	26	35.6
20 years or more	18	27.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>

*Due to the small sample, analysis by sub-group was not possible.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

### 5.3.2 Roles held in the profession

While working in the profession, almost all had worked in clinical practice (96%).

Table 5.3 (note that respondents were asked to select all the roles in which they had worked as a vet nurse so could select more than one option) shows that other roles included:

- Working in academia and animal charities, each reported by around 21% of respondents.
- Working in industry, such as animal health and insurance, reported by around 12% of respondents.
- Working for a government department or agency, or in research, each reported by 4% of respondents.

**Table 5.3: Roles held while working in the veterinary nursing profession**

	2024 N	2024 %
Clinical practice work	70	95.9
Academia	15	20.5
Animal charity	15	20.5
Government department or agency	3	4.1
Research	3	4.1
Industry (e.g. animal health, insurance)	9	12.3

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 5.3.3 Reasons for leaving/not joining the profession

The reasons for leaving the profession commonly cited burnout, low pay, poor progression opportunities, poor work-life balance and a lack of respect for vet nurses. Other less common reasons included to try something new, poor management, to prioritise health and to look after elderly relatives.

Similarly, those who had not worked in the profession at all explained that this was due to a lack of vet nurse work available locally to them, and to continue working part time out of the profession while studying.

## 5.4 Intention to join/re-join the profession

Respondents not working in the profession were asked if they intended to seek employment in the veterinary nursing profession in the future. To this:

- The largest proportion (40%, 30 respondents) were unsure if they would rejoin the profession.
- Following this, 38% (29 respondents) said they would not join or re-join the profession.
- Just 8% said they would join or re-join the profession in the next year, compared with 15% who said they would join in the longer term.

## 6 Work within the profession

This chapter focuses on respondents working entirely or mainly within the veterinary nursing profession, including their organisation, area of work, working hours, qualifications and future career plans.

### Chapter summary

- Almost all respondents (98%) said they worked within the profession, an increase on previous surveys.
- The majority (83%) did not have a job in addition to their main job. Of those who did, 60% said their additional work was either in the veterinary nursing profession (for example, clinical coach, working for another practice) or animal-related (for example, working for an animal charity).
- The trend of working with small animals, observed in previous surveys, continued; 75% of respondents, compared to 69% in 2014, worked in small animal practice. Working in mixed practice has decreased considerably, from 18% in 2014 to 8%.
- In almost all areas of work, actual working hours were higher than basic contracted hours. The average number of additional hours was two, and the areas with the highest number of additional hours were equine practices (five hours) and veterinary nursing education (four hours).
- Full-time workers, on average, worked 41 hours per week when they were contracted an average of 39 hours. Part-time workers worked on average, two additional hours at 25 hours worked compared to 23 hours contracted per week.
- A small proportion (16%) worked on call, with two-fifths of those required to be awake all night; those working in equine practices were most likely to say they worked on call.
- The most common benefits at work were discounts, financial support for training and RCVS retention fees.
- Most (70%) planned to stay in the profession for more than five years. However, 5% planned to retire in the next five years and 25% planned to leave within five years for reasons other than retirement. Those working in clinical practice were notably more likely to plan to leave than those outside clinical practice: 26% and 14%, respectively.
- The top four reasons for planning to leave the profession were pay (68%), not feeling valued (52%), poor work-life balance (50%) and dissatisfaction with career opportunities (43%).
- Respondents, on the whole, did not plan to study for relevant qualifications in addition to those they held.
- The majority of respondents have provided support to student vet nurses, 56% currently and 33% in the past.
- Two-thirds had received an appraisal in the 12 months prior to the survey.

---

## 6.1 Summary of working within the profession

### 6.1.1 Demographics

Almost all respondents (98%) said they were working in the profession at the time of completing the survey either entirely (89%) or partly (9%), as Table 6.1 shows.

This is an increase on previous years:

- In 2019, 96% of respondents worked within the profession.
- In 2014, 95% of respondents worked within the profession.

---

**Table 6.1: Proportion of respondents working within the veterinary nursing profession**

	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Entirely within the veterinary nursing profession	3,235	89.2
Partly within the veterinary nursing profession	312	8.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,547</b>	<b>97.8</b>

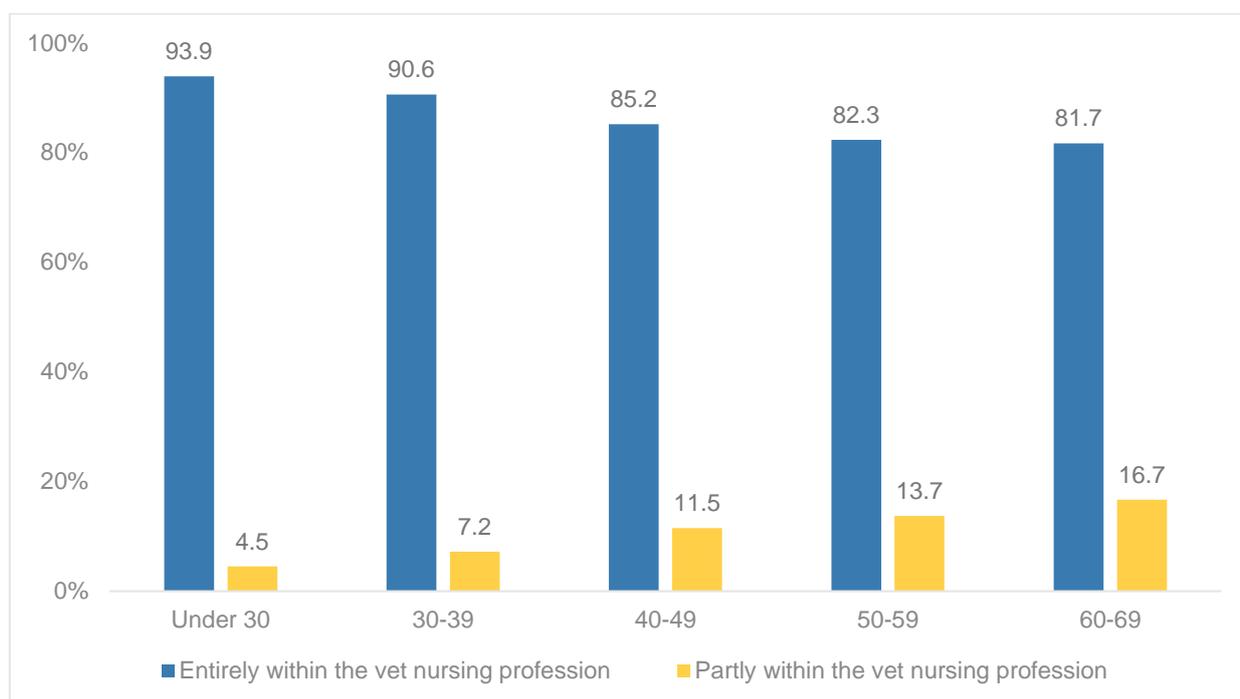
*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

---

Further analysis, displayed in Figure 6.1 shows that:

- Younger respondents were the most likely to work entirely within the profession (94%), with a gradual decline as age increased.
- Conversely, older respondents were more likely to work partly in the profession than younger respondents, with a similarly notable increase with age.

**Figure 6.1: Level of work in the profession by respondent age**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 6.1.2 Primary place of work

Table 6.2 shows that the majority of respondents (90%) worked from workplace premises, such as a practice or office<sup>5</sup>.

**Table 6.2: Primary place of work**

	2024 N	2024 %
Workplace premises (e.g. practice, office)	3,208	90.0
Hybrid (i.e. where time is split between workplace premises and home)	191	5.4
Home	149	4.2
Other	18	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,566</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Respondents were asked to state how many days per week they worked remotely or away from their workplace premises. A large proportion (83%) said they typically spent zero days per week working remotely. Of those who did spend at least one day per week working remotely:

<sup>5</sup> Similar to intended duration to remain in the UK, analysis was not able to highlight any robust differences between groups due to the spread of responses across groups.

- 10% worked remotely between one and three days per week, with 5% working remotely for one day and a further 5% working remotely for two or three days.
- A further 5% worked remotely for between four and seven days per week.
- 1% said that the number of days they worked remotely varied too much for them to be able to say.

### **6.1.3 Organisation type**

Respondents working in the profession were asked to indicate the type of organisation they worked in.

Table 6.3 shows that:

- Increases in the proportion of respondents working in small animal (including exotics) practices, seen in previous surveys, continued, though could be seen to be slowing, from 69% in 2014 and 73% in 2019 to 75% in 2024.
- The trend of lower proportions of vet nurses working in mixed practice continued, down from 18% in 2014 and 12% in 2019 to 8% in 2024.
- The proportion of vet nurses working in a referral practice and/or consultancy has fallen back to 2014 levels (11%) after reaching 14% in 2019.
- The proportion working in veterinary nursing education has increased from 3% in 2014 and 2019 to 5%.

Descriptions of 'other' organisations included corporate employers, self-employment, locum nursing, insurance and sales.

**Table 6.3: Organisation type**

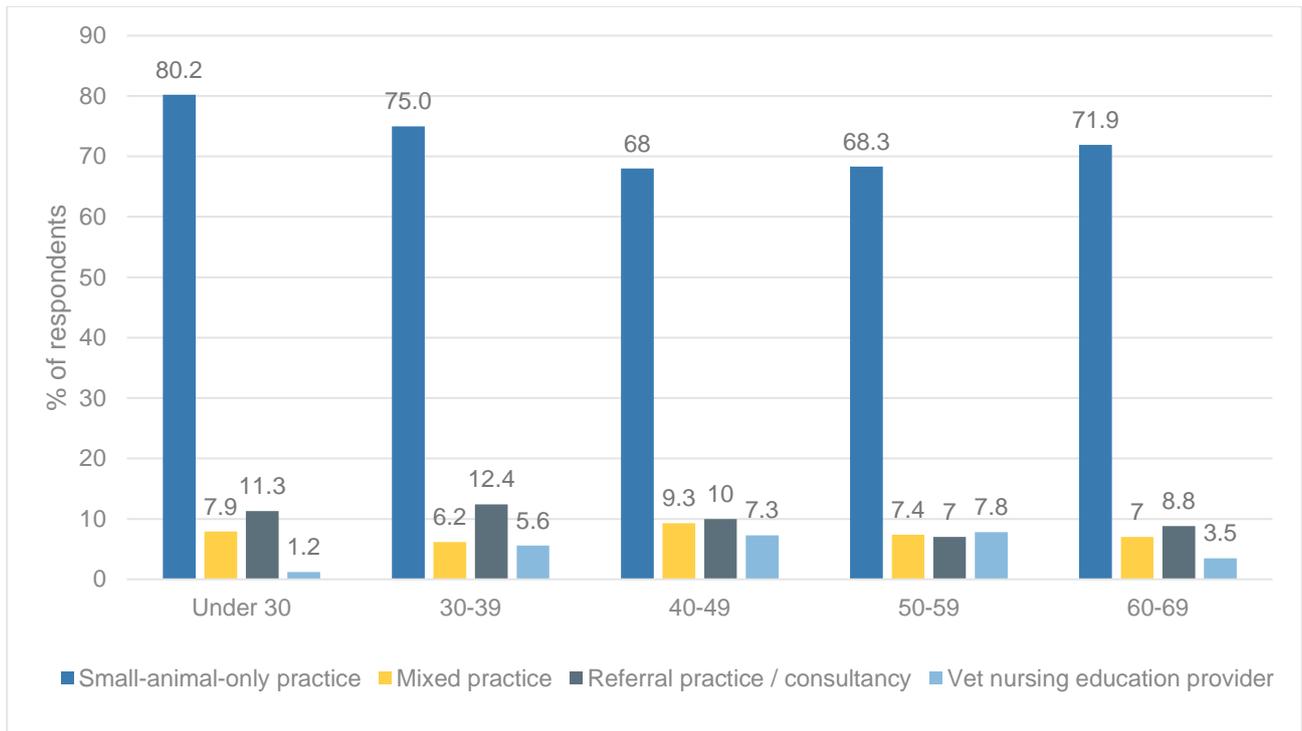
	<b>2024 N</b>	<b>2024 %</b>	<b>2019 %</b>	<b>2014 %</b>
Small-animal-only practice (including small animal practices that treat exotics)	2,594	74.7	73.2	68.8
Referral practice/consultancy	380	10.9	13.9	11.2
Mixed practice	267	7.7	12.0	17.6
Veterinary nursing education provider (college/university)	174	5.0	2.8	2.8
Charity or trust	145	4.2	3.8	3.4
Other university/education establishment	73	2.1	3.6	3.8
Equine-only practice	62	1.8	1.3	2.6
Zoo/wildlife/conservation	33	1.0	1.1	-
Commerce and industry	32	0.9	0.9	0.4
Other first opinion practice	24	0.7	1.4	2.0
Association, professional or regulatory body (RCVS, BVNA etc.)	22	0.6	-	-
Tele-triage	18	0.5	0.3	-
Tele-medicine client-to-client	10	0.3	0.2	-
Farm-animal-only practice	5	0.1	0.1	0.6
Categories with fewer than five responses	10	0.3	-	-
Other	61	1.8	1.8	1.1

<sup>‘-’</sup> Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

Due to the small numbers in some areas, additional analysis was only conducted on categories where a response option received more than 100 responses. Figure 6.2 shows there was some variation in organisation type by age group.

**Figure 6.2: Organisation type by age, for categories with >100 responses**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 6.1.4 Main area of work

Respondents who selected more than one organisation type were asked to identify which was their main place of work.

Table 6.4 shows that the areas of work where the highest proportion of respondents had their main job were:

- Small animal practice (51%).
- Referral practice and/or consultancy (17%).
- Veterinary nursing education (9%).

**Table 6.4: Main area of work for respondents with more than one**

	<b>2024 N</b>	<b>2024 %</b>
Small-animal-only practice (including small animal practices that treat exotics)	182	50.8
Referral practice/consultancy	61	17
Veterinary nursing education provider (college/university)	32	8.9
Charity or trust	16	4.5
Other university/education establishment	12	3.4
Mixed practice	9	2.5
Commerce and industry	9	2.5
Equine-only practice	8	2.2
Tele-triage	6	1.7
Categories with fewer than three responses	11	3.1
Other	12	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 6.1.5 Working hours

Respondents working in the profession were asked to provide information on their contracted hours and the actual hours they work. Table 6.5 shows that all areas of work have a higher mean number of actual hours worked than mean basic contracted hours.

The three areas of work with the greatest increase in the mean number of hours worked were:

- Equine practice, with a mean increase of five hours.
- Other first-opinion practice, with a mean increase of over four hours.
- Veterinary nursing education providers, with a mean increase of nearly four hours.

Conversely, the three areas of work with the lowest increase, albeit an increase, saw an average increase of around 1.5 hours. These were:

- Charities or trusts, tele-triage, and 'other'.

Across areas of work:

- The mean and modal number of additional hours worked was two hours.
- The number of additional hours worked ranged from 40 hours below contracted to over 100 hours more than contracted.

The average contracted hours for full-time vet nurses was 39 hours per week, but the average actually worked was 41 hours per week. For part-time workers, the average contracted hours were 23 hours per week, with 25 hours per week the average actually worked.

**Table 6.5: Basic contracted hours with comparison to actual hours worked**

	Contracted hours		Actual hours	
	Mean	N	Mean	N
Commerce and industry	36.5	28	38.9	28
Equine-only practice	35.0	57	40.2	55
Small-animal-only practice (including small animal practices that treat exotics)	33.3	2,437	35.2	2364
Mixed practice	31.8	240	34.1	234
Referral practice/consultancy	30.7	321	32.9	317
Farm-animal only practice	29.6	5	38.4	4
Veterinary nursing education provider (college/university)	27.8	149	31.5	146
Other first opinion practice	27.5	15	31.7	14
Other university/education establishment	26.8	62	29.6	61
Charity or trust	26.6	129	28.0	125
Tele-triage	23.5	17	24.9	17
Association, professional or regulatory body (RCVS, BVNA etc.)	18.0	20	20.2	20
Tele-medicine vet-to-client	16.5	6	19.0	5
Zoo/wildlife/conservation	14.8	25	17.1	21
Tele-medicine vet-to-vet	14.3	3	14.3	3
Other	25.9	46	27.6	45

*Note: means and counts are only displayed for categories where there were more than three responses for both contracted and actual hours.*

*Note: where responses are low, the mean might be skewed and therefore not representative of the most common response provided*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

Further analysis was conducted to investigate differences in the number of hours worked by respondent characteristics, and how this interacts with whether a respondent is working full time or part time, or within the UK or outside of the UK. Analysis did not highlight any statistically significant differences between responses.

### 6.1.6 Working on-call

Only a small proportion (16%) of respondents indicated that they work on call, with 8% working on-call on premises and 10% off premises.

Table 6.6 shows that within this group, around two-fifths are required to be awake all night while working on-call.

---

**Table 6.6: Working on-call requirements**

	<b>2024 N</b>	<b>2024 %</b>
Asleep when not working	251	59.5
Required to be awake all night	171	40.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

---

Similar to contracted and actual hours, respondents who said they worked on call were asked to share the number of hours they worked on call, on and off their premises of work.

Table 6.7 shows that:

- Respondents working on-call generally worked fewer hours on premises than off premises.
- The three areas of work with the highest average number of hours worked on-call both on and off premises were equine-only practice (12 hours off premises, seven hours on premises), mixed practice (five hours off premises, three hours on premises), and tele-triage (five hours off premises, three hours on premises).
- Three areas of work reported no off premises hours working on-call, while five areas of work reported no hours on-call on premises.
- The areas of work with the largest difference between off and on premises hours worked on call were; equine-only practice (average decrease of five hours) followed by referral practice/consultancy, farm-animal only practice and tele-triage (each with a mean decrease of around three hours).
- Only two areas of work, other first-opinion practice and 'other', had an increase in the number of on-call hours worked on premises.

**Table 6.7: On-call hours off-premises and on-premises**

	Hours on-call off premises		Hours on-call on premises	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
Equine-only practice	47	12.0	48	7.5
Mixed practice	211	5.1	208	3.2
Tele-triage	16	5.1	15	2.7
Referral practice/consultancy	281	4.3	265	1.3
Farm-animal-only practice	4	2.5	4	0.0
Zoo/Wildlife/Conservation	19	2.3	18	1.3
Small-animal-only practice (including small animal practices that treat exotics)	2,156	1.4	2122	1.3
Charity or trust	114	1.4	112	1.4
Veterinary school	126	1.2	127	0.6
Other first opinion practice	12	1.0	12	1.8
Other university/education establishment	52	0.3	52	0.0
Association, professional or regulatory body (RCVS, BVNA, etc.)	14	0.1	15	0.1
Telemedicine vet-to-client	4	0.0	5	0.0
Telemedicine vet-to-vet	3	0.0	3	0.0
Commerce and industry	23	0.0	23	0.0
Other	35	0.7	35	0.9

*Note: means and counts are only displayed for categories where there were more than three responses for each on-site and off-site on-call working.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

Further analysis of on-call hours was conducted to explore the intersection between respondent groups and whether an individual is working full time or part time<sup>6</sup>. Table 6.8 shows that:

- Part-time workers with caring responsibilities worked fewer hours on-call both on and off premises than full-time workers.
- Full-time workers with health conditions worked more on-call hours on premises than those without health conditions.
- Respondents working within clinical practice worked more hours on-call both on and off premises than those working outside clinical practice.

<sup>6</sup> Planned analysis by gender was not possible due to large disparities between group sizes.

**Table 6.8: Average number of hours worked on-call, both on and off premises, by full-time/part-time working and respondent characteristics**

		Off premises		On premises	
		Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time
Caring responsibilities	Yes	2.4	0.9	1.6	0.7
	No	2.5	1.8	1.8	0.5
Health conditions	Yes	2.2	1.1	2.2	0.7
	No	2.6	1.2	1.6	0.6
In/out of clinical practice	Within clinical practice	2.6	1.1	2.0	0.7
	Outside of clinical practice	1.0	0.8	0.5	0.7

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Similar analysis was conducted to explore the intersection of whether an individual worked primarily in the UK and their characteristics. It is important to consider the small number of respondents working outside of the UK in the survey when interpreting these findings. Table 6.9 shows:

- Females working outside the UK worked considerably more hours on-call off premises than those working within the UK.
- Respondents with care responsibilities working in the UK worked more hours on-call on premises than those working in the UK without care responsibilities.
- Respondents without care responsibilities working outside the UK worked considerably more hours on-call both off and on premises than those working in the UK.
- Those working outside the UK with health conditions worked notably more hours on-call both on and off premises than those with health conditions working in the UK.
- Respondents working outside the UK work more hours on-call both on and off premises than those working in the UK within and outside clinical practice.

**Table 6.9: On-call hours on and off premises by country of work (UK/Non-UK) and respondent characteristics**

		Off premises		On premises	
		UK	Non-UK	UK	Non-UK
Gender	Female	1.9	9.3	1.4	1.8
	Male	2.0	1.1	-	-
Care responsibilities	Yes	1.6	1.1	1.1	0.1
	No	2.2	11.7	0.1	3.6
Health conditions	Yes	1.8	8.0	1.7	4.6
	No	2.0	9.9	1.3	0.6
In/out of clinical practice	Within clinical practice	2.0	9.8	1.6	3.7
	Outside of clinical practice	0.9	4.0	0.5	0.0

‘-’ Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### 6.1.7 Work-related benefits

Survey respondents were asked to select the benefits available to them through their employer. Table 6.10 illustrates that:

- The three most commonly selected benefits were discounts (86%), financial support for training and/or CPD (84%) and RCVS retention fees (83%).
- Conversely, the three benefits selected the least were additional RCVS fees (4%), shares in the business (5%) and membership of a technical or scientific library (9%).
- Notably, two-thirds (67%) of participants indicated they have access to paid time off for training and CPD.

A small proportion of participants indicated that they have access to benefits other than those presented to them in the survey. Open text responses included birthdays off work, annual bonuses, benefits hubs, gym memberships and enhanced maternity pay.

**Table 6.10: Workplace benefits**

	2024 N	2024 %
Discounts (employee discount schemes, reduced price for treatment/products)	2,708	85.5
Financial support for training/CPD	2,673	84.3
RCVS retention fees (whole or part)	2,637	83.2
Time off (paid) for training/CPD	2,077	65.5
Access to scientific literature and research papers	1,102	34.8
Insurance (health/medical, life and travel)	1,097	34.6
Professional indemnity insurance	937	29.6
Pensions that are additional or not part of the standard workplace pension scheme	876	27.6
Employee assistance programme	835	26.3
Travel costs (cycle to work schemes, car/van/fuel allowances)	763	24.1
Professional subscriptions (e.g. membership of a veterinary nursing association)	747	23.6
Time off (unpaid) for training/CPD	342	10.8
Membership of a technical/scientific library	272	8.6
Shares in business	151	4.8
Additional RCVS fees	115	3.6
Other	38	1.2

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

### **6.1.8 Additional jobs**

Respondents working in the profession were asked whether they had any additional jobs outside their main role. The majority (83%) said they did not have an additional job.

Those who had an additional job or jobs were asked to select the nature of their work.

Table 6.11 shows:

- The three most commonly selected responses were working for another practice (17%), other animal-related non-veterinary work (17%) and clinical coaching (9%).
- The three least frequently selected responses were childcare (>1%), and retail, health and beauty internal quality assessor and bar work, each with around 2%.
- 60% said their additional jobs were either within the veterinary nursing profession (e.g. clinical coach, teaching veterinary nursing) or animal-related (e.g. voluntary work for an animal charity).

Over a third of respondents selected that the nature of their additional role fell into the 'other' category. Responses included (but were not limited to):

- Art and art teaching
- Business management
- Unpaid carer
- Gym and/or swimming instructor
- Yoga teaching.

**Table 6.11: Nature of additional jobs**

	2024 N	2024 %
Working for another practice	98	17.3
Other animal-related non-veterinary work	97	17.1
Clinical coach	48	8.5
Non-veterinary voluntary work	45	8.0
Teaching veterinary nursing	44	7.8
Voluntary work for a veterinary-related charity	38	6.7
Farm work (non-veterinary)	32	5.7
Office work	19	3.4
Teaching outside veterinary nursing	19	3.4
Cleaning	16	2.8
Other hospitality work	13	2.3
Internal quality assessor	12	2.1
Bar work	12	2.1
Health and beauty	11	1.9
Retail	10	1.8
Telemedicine or tele-triage	4	0.7
Other	196	34.6

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further analysis, displayed in Table 6.12, displays statistically significant responses to whether an individual has an additional job based on their age and whether they are working in or outside clinical practice. This analysis shows:

- Younger respondents (those aged 39 and under) are less likely to have an additional job than those aged 40 and over.
- Respondents working outside clinical practice are slightly more likely to have an additional job either within or outside the veterinary profession.

**Table 6.12: Additional roles by respondent characteristics**

		2024 N	2024 %
Age	Under 30	73	12.5
	30-39	111	14.5
	40-49	104	21.6
	50-59	55	23.9
	60 and over	13	22.8
In/out of clinical practice	Within clinical practice	490	16.7
	Outside clinical practice	55	23.1

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Finally, respondents were asked to state the number of hours they worked in their additional roles per week. To this:

- Responses ranged from 0 to 63 hours per week.
- The mean number of hours worked in additional roles per week was 10.
- The standard deviation from the mean number of hours worked was 10 hours.
- The median number of hours worked in additional roles per week was eight.

## 6.2 Career plans

### 6.2.1 Career

Respondents were asked about their career plans in relation to the veterinary nursing profession. Table 6.13 displays this data, which shows:

- 70% of respondents planned to stay in the profession for more than five years, similar (though slightly lower) than the 72% in 2019.
- Around 5% of respondents planned to retire in the next five years, with the largest proportion planning to retire in 3 to 5 years.
- One-quarter (25%) of respondents plan to leave the profession within the next five years for reasons other than to retire, similar to 2019 data.

**Table 6.13: Career plans in relation to the veterinary nursing profession**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %
Stay in the profession for more than 5 years	2,351	70.2	72.0
Fully retire within the next year	7	0.2	-
Fully retire within 1 to 2 years	37	1.1	-
Fully retire within 3 to 5 years	109	3.3	-
Leave the profession within the next year (other than for retirement)	124	3.7	3.4
Leave the profession within the next 1 to 2 years (other than for retirement)	262	7.8	6.8
Leave the profession in the next 3 to 5 years (other than for retirement)	458	13.7	14.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,348</b>	<b>100</b>	

<sup>1</sup> - Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further analysis shows that:

- Respondents with health conditions are more likely to plan to leave the profession than those without health conditions (29% compared to 24%).

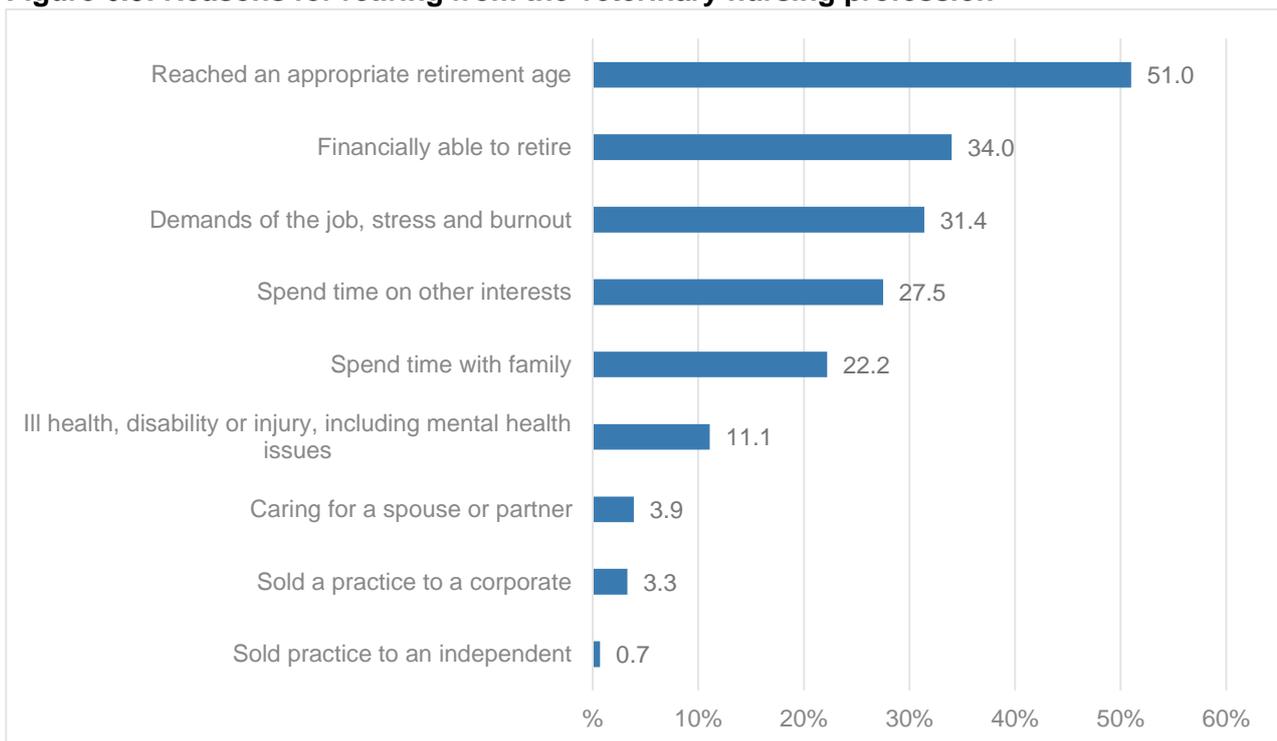
- Respondents working within clinical practice are considerably more likely to plan to leave the profession within the next five years than those working outside clinical practice (26% compared to 14%).

### 6.2.2 Plans to retire

Of the small proportion of respondents indicating that they were planning to retire in the next five years (Figure 6.3):

- Over half of those planning to retire were doing so because they have reached an appropriate retirement age.
- A further third felt they were financially able to retire.
- ‘Demands of the job, stress and burnout’ was selected by almost one-third (31%) of respondents.
- A small proportion of respondents (4%) said they were planning to retire as their practice had been sold to another organisation, mostly (>3%) a corporate.

**Figure 6.3: Reasons for retiring from the veterinary nursing profession**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Those with other reasons explained they wanted to retire due to poor pay, to go travelling and no longer enjoying working in the profession.

### 6.2.3 Reasons for planning to leaving the profession

Table 6.14 displays the reasons those planning to leave the profession within the next five years gave, with comparisons to 2019 and 2014 survey data, illustrating that:

- There has been a decrease in the proportion of respondents choosing historically common reasons for leaving (e.g. pay and not feeling rewarded or valued); however, these remained the most commonly selected reasons.
- Reasons for leaving with the highest percentage point increase on 2019 data were the burden of bureaucracy/legislation (7%), chronic stress (5%) and poor work-life balance (4%).
- The increased proportion of respondents selecting the burden of bureaucracy/legislation dramatically reduced a downward trend observed over previous years.
- The reasons for leaving with the largest percentage point decrease on 2019 data were career change/new challenge (11%), pay (9%) and not feeling rewarded (8%).
- New response options were included in the 2024 survey and garnered notable responses, including lack of support from management (32%), workplace culture (27%) and unfulfilling work (25%).

Some respondents selected there were other reasons for planning to leave the veterinary nursing profession. These included:

- Poor treatment from clients
- Compassion fatigue
- Corporate takeover
- Changes to the industry
- Lack of progression opportunities.

**Table 6.14: Reasons for planning to leave the veterinary nursing profession within the next five years**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Pay	575	68.2	77.3	70.5
Not feeling rewarded/valued (non-financial)	439	52.1	59.8	54.0
Poor work-life balance	417	49.5	46.2	-
Dissatisfaction with career opportunities	361	42.8	40.2	40.3
Chronic stress	288	34.2	28.6	-
Long/unsociable hours	285	33.8	34.9	-
Lack of flexibility in hours	256	30.4	28.5	-
Lack of support from management	266	31.6	-	-
Career change/new challenge	246	29.2	40.6	46.3
Workplace culture	225	26.7	-	-
Unfulfilling work	210	24.9	-	-
Health issues (mental)	145	17.2	14.2	-
Health issues (physical)	132	15.7	14.0	-
Lack of adjustments/support for mental health issues	125	14.8	-	-
Care of dependants/to have family	120	14.2	18.6	19.0
Burden of bureaucracy/legislation	107	12.7	6.4	9.4
Leadership practices	80	9.5	-	-
Lack of adjustments/support for physical health issues	72	8.5	-	-
Bullying and unfair treatment	65	7.7	-	-
Career break	51	6.0	-	-
Travel	51	6.0	3.2	-
Lack of adjustments/support for disclosed neurodivergent condition	41	4.9	-	-
Discrimination, victimisation or harassment	28	3.3	2.1	-
Study	24	2.8	4.7	6.3
Relocation	16	1.9	-	-
Emigration	11	1.3	2.1	-
Brexit	9	1.1	0.9	-
Other	57	6.8	5.2	6.4

*Note: Response options selected by fewer than three respondents are not displayed.*

*‘-’ Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014*

A small handful (3%) of respondents reported that they were planning to leave the profession due to experiences of discrimination, victimisation and/or harassment, and a further 8% were planning to leave due to bullying and/or unfair treatment.

Table 6.15 shows that:

- Discrimination due to disability was most commonly reported (36%).
- Over two-fifths of respondents experienced discrimination for 'other' subjects, including physical characteristics, being a single parent and/or having childcare commitments, and general health and wellbeing.

**Table 6.15: Subject of discrimination, victimisation and/or harassment**

	N	%
Disability	10	35.7
Gender	5	17.9
Age	4	14.3
Pregnancy and/or maternity/paternity	3	10.7
Sexual orientation	3	10.7
Other	12	42.9

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

Those who said they had experienced bullying and/or unfair treatment disclosed their experiences, which included exclusion from cliques within staff, favouritism from management, bullying after a whistleblowing event, not being able to book holiday in line with contracts, and from vets due to a perceived power imbalance.

*Another registered vet nurse constantly telling me my work wasn't good enough, would fly off into a rage at me with no warning or spend weeks completely ignoring me.*

*The general population think it's okay to treat us like dirt and we have no backing or support from anyone about this.*

*I was called fat when 35 weeks pregnant and received no support from management.*

*Favouritism through rewards/flexibility and punishment/disciplinary.*

A more detailed exploration of bullying and harassment within the profession is outlined in Chapter 7.16.

## 6.3 Learning and development

### 6.3.1 Study plans

Table 6.16 illustrates that generally, respondents were not planning to study additional qualifications relevant to their role in the veterinary nursing profession in the next five years, despite 12% of vet nurse respondents currently studying for a qualification. Of those who held, were studying for or planned to study for additional qualifications:

- Nearly two-fifths (38%) and around one-third (31%) held or planned to study for an RCVS DipAVN qualification.
- Around three-fifths of respondents were each studying for or planning to study for an RCVS CertAVN qualification, the highest of all responses.
- Around 12% of respondents held a Veterinary Nursing FdSc top-up and a further third held a Veterinary Nursing BSc top-up; however, few respondents were studying or planning to study for these qualifications.
- Few respondents held postgraduate qualifications; however, there was a considerable proportion of respondents studying for, or planning to study for, a veterinary-related master's degree.

**Table 6.16: Respondents' study plans**

	Holds		Studying for		Plans to study for		No plans to study for	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
RCVS DipAVN	214	38.3	12	6.9	175	33.8	568	71.4
RCVS CertAVN	168	30.1	100	57.5	332	59.3	522	65.6
Veterinary nursing degree FdSc top-up	65	11.6	2	1.1	30	5.4	582	73.1
Veterinary nursing degree BSc top-up	182	32.6	15	8.6	59	10.5	572	71.9
Master's degree (veterinary-related)	46	8.2	43	24.7	116	20.7	657	82.5
PhD or other professional doctorate (veterinary-related)	9	1.6	11	6.3	37	6.6	714	89.7
Business qualification relevant to running or managing a business	214	10.7	12	15.2	175	14.1	568	86.4

*Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% as respondents could select categories that were relevant to them.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

Further analysis exploring responses by age found that:

- Over half of respondents aged 40-59 held an RCVS DipAVN.
- One-third of respondents aged 30-49 held an RCVS CertAVN.
- Respondents aged under 30 were the most likely to hold either an FdSc or BSc top-up.
- Respondents aged 50 and over were the least likely to be planning to study for any type of qualification.

### 6.3.2 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Respondents were asked to indicate what proportion of their CPD has been paid for (by any means) in the last 12 months and what proportion is free of charge. Averaging responses across all respondents, Table 6.17 shows that:

- 
- The average proportions of both paid-for and free CPD were similar at around 60%.
  - The modal response had greater variation, with the modal proportion of paid-for CPD at 50% and the modal proportion of free CPD being 100%.
  - Both had similar standard deviations from the mean response.

---

**Table 6.17: Extent to which CPD is paid for (%)**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Std dev</b>
Paid for	58.0	50.0	32.4
Free of charge	58.2	100	32.8

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

---

Further analysis, displayed in

Table 6.18, shows that:

- Those working outside clinical practice had a slightly higher proportion of free CPD than paid-for CPD.
- Respondents working in small-animal-only practices had the highest mean proportion of paid-for CPD at 83%, while all other practice types averaged at around 60-66%.
- Those working part time had a slightly higher proportion of free CPD than those working full time.
- The proportion of paid-for CPD increases gradually as respondents become more senior.
- Locums had the lowest proportion of paid-for CPD.

**Table 6.18: CPD funding by job role characteristics**

		Mean %	
		Paid for	Free of charge
In/out of clinical practice	Within clinical practice	59.4	57.8
	Outside of clinical practice	55.8	62.4
Type of clinical practice	Small-animal-only	83.3	50.0
	Mixed practice	63.1	36.9
	Equine-only	66.3	40.4
	Referral practice/consultancy	66.3	58.3
Full/part time	Full time	60.5	56.6
	Part time	55.6	62.0
Role	Nurse	57.4	59.6
	Senior Nurse	59.7	53.8
	Clinical Coach	61.2	55.1
	Practice manager or Administrator	65.4	46.9
	Practice owner	70.8	43.5
	Independent veterinary nursing service	62.0	55.7
	Locum	49.8	68.3

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Exploring CPD funding streams, Table 6.19 illustrates that:

- The highest mean proportion of CPD funding came from employers or practices, at around 84%, increasing beyond 2014 levels after a fall in 2019.
- Conversely, the lowest mean proportions came from grant funding (3%) and commercial sponsorship (10%), following the trend from previous years.
- Both self-funding and 'other' funding sources increased on previous years, with the average proportion of self-funded CPD reaching almost 50%.

**Table 6.19: CPD funding sources (%)**

	2024	2019	2014
Employer or practice	83.6	54.1	71.8
Self-funded	48.4	26.6	16.7
Commercial sponsorship	9.6	7.0	10.1
Grant	2.7	5.5	0.3
Other	18.6	6.8	1.0

Note: Respondents were asked to provide answers totalling 100%. Due to variations in responses across the sample, the means displayed in this table do not total 100%.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

'Other' CPD funding sources included government funding, being invited to conferences and webinars, and winning competitions.

### 6.3.3 Supporting Student Vet Nurses and vet students on extra mural studies

Table 6.20, shows that:

- The majority of respondents have provided support to student vet nurses at some point in their career, with over half (56%) indicating they were doing this at the time of the survey and a third (33%) saying they had in the past.
- Over half of respondents have not provided support for veterinary students on extra mural studies (EMS), while around a quarter were either providing EMS support at the time of the survey (27%) or they had in the past (25%).

**Table 6.20: Vet nurses support for student vet nurses and vet students on EMS**

	Support student vet nurses	Support vet students on EMS
Yes, currently	55.9	27.1
Yes, in the past	32.6	24.6
No	18.9	51.4

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further analysis conducted on support for student vet nurses, displayed in

Table 6.21, shows that:

- Respondents working inside clinical practice were more likely to be actively supporting a student vet nurse at the time of completing the survey than those working outside clinical practice.
- Around 50% of respondents working part time were providing support to a student vet nurse at the time of the survey, compared to 59% of respondents working full time.
- Clinical coaches and independent vet nurse service providers were the two roles with the highest proportion of respondents actively providing support to student vet nurses, (96% and 88% respectively) while locums and practice managers had the lowest proportion (38% and 42% respectively).
- Nurses (25%), those working outside clinical practice (24%) and locums (22%) were the least likely to report having ever supported student vet nurses.

**Table 6.21: Support for student vet nurses by job role characteristics**

		Support for a student vet nurse		
		Yes, currently	Yes, in the past	No
In/out of clinical practice	Within clinical practice	57.7	31.4	18.5
	Outside clinical practice	34.2	46.9	23.5
Full/part time	Full time	58.8	30.5	18.4
	Part time	49.1	37.6	19.8
Role	Nurse	52.2	30.0	24.8
	Senior Nurse	69.5	30.8	8.4
	Clinical Coach	95.9	9.2	-
	Practice Manager or Administrator	41.7	44.4	18.1
	Practice Owner	52.8	41.7	8.3
	Independent vet nurse service provider	87.5	37.5	-
	Locum	38.3	47.4	21.5

<sup>‘-‘</sup> Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Similar analysis was conducted to explore how support for EMS varied by job role.

Table 6.22 illustrates that:

- A considerably higher proportion of those working within clinical practice were actively providing EMS support, however, over 50% of each group said they had not provided any EMS support.
- A higher proportion of respondents working full time reported having experience of supporting students on EMS than those working part time.
- Senior Nurses and Practice owners reported giving the highest levels of EMS support.

**Table 6.22: Support for EMS by job role characteristics**

		Support for EMS		
		Yes, currently	Yes, in the past	No
In/out of clinical practice	Within clinical practice	28.6	24.0	50.5
	Outside clinical practice	8.7	31.5	61.4
Full/part time	Full time	29.0	24.8	49.6
	Part time	22.5	23.9	56.0
Role	Nurse	23.1	21.6	58.1
	Senior Nurse	39.6	25.8	38.2
	Clinical Coach	30.9	22.7	48.5
	Practice Manager or Administrator	32.4	29.6	40.8
	Practice Owner	38.9	33.3	33.3
	Independent vet nurse service provider	*	*	75.0
	Locum	18.1	31.4	53.3

*\*\* Denotes fewer than 3 responses to this category.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

### 6.3.4 Appraisals

Around two-thirds of respondents (65%) said they had received an appraisal or performance review in the 12 months prior to the survey while the remaining third had not<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Statistical analysis was carried out to look for differences with type of practice, working status, full time/part time and role in practice, but no significant differences were found.

## 7 Work in clinical practice

This chapter focuses on respondents working within clinical practice. It covers the following: working location, working activities (including clinics and areas of expertise), role within the practice, practice ownership structure, working as a locum, working time spent on different animals, remote services provided to clients, how practices cover 24/7 commitments, out of hours working, bullying and harassment, rest periods and holidays, and practice staffing.

### Chapter summary

- Almost all respondents (93%) worked within clinical practice: 81% entirely and 12% partly. Under 8% worked outside clinical practice.
- The large majority (86%) worked in England, 9% in Scotland, 5% in Wales, 2% in Northern Ireland and less than 0.5% in the Republic of Ireland (note that some worked in more than one country).
- Two-fifths worked in an area that was a mix of urban and rural, and a similar proportion worked in an entirely urban area; only 17% worked in a rural area.
- The most common daily tasks completed were injections, clinical cleaning and dispensing medication to clients. The most common clinics were post-operative checks, nail clipping and vaccinations. A fifth were not involved in any nursing clinics. The most common expertise offered to clients or employers was nail clipping, anal gland emptying and anaesthesia.
- The position in practice for three-fifths (57%) was that of a nurse. Over a quarter (29%) were head, deputy or senior nurses, which is lower than in 2019 (32%). Similarly, the proportion of locums also fell, from 6% to 4%.
- 62% worked in a practice that is part of a corporate group or a joint venture, while 29% worked in independent practices.
- 13% worked as a locum or independent practitioner in addition to their main role, with the most common reason being for financial reasons.
- The majority of working time was spent with dogs (47%) and cats (33%). Other activities taking up significant amounts of time were practice management/administration (14%), mentoring and training others (10%), and people management (9%).
- The majority of respondents (87%) did not carry out routine visits to clients, and only a small number (6%) provided remote services. Most (90%) worked from workplace premises, where they spent no time working remotely.
- Over half (52%) of practices used a dedicated out-of-hours service provider, whilst a third (33%) covered their own out-of-hours work.
- A third (37%) personally did out-of-hours work.
- Respondents attended more emergencies at the practice, than away from the practice or remotely, with an average of 26 emergencies per month.

- Just under half (48%) had experienced harassment or bullying from clients and/or colleague in the last year; two-fifths (39%) received this from clients, and a further fifth (21%) from colleagues. Male, gay/lesbian and bisexual respondents, those with caring responsibilities or health conditions, and those working in charities were more likely than average to report experiencing these behaviours from both clients and colleagues.
- Over half (52%) always received a minimum rest period of 11 hours in each 24-hour period; however, 7% reported seldom or never receiving this rest period.
- When asked about the number of full-time-equivalent vets, vet nurses and student vet nurses at their workplace, the mean averages were 6.8 vets, 7.8 vet nurses and 2.2 student vet nurses. However, the numbers varied considerably, with some very large workplaces; the modes were three vets, two vet nurses and one student vet nurse.

Over four-fifths of respondents (81%) work entirely within clinical practice, and a further 12% work partly within clinical practice (Table 7.1). The remaining 8% of respondents work outside clinical practice.

**Table 7.1: Participant involvement in clinical practice**

	N	%
Entirely within clinical veterinary nursing practice	2,604	80.7
Partly within and partly outside clinical veterinary practice	380	11.8
Entirely outside clinical veterinary nursing practice	244	7.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,228</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

Further analysis exploring involvement in clinical practice found that some respondent groups were more likely to be working in clinical practice than others.

Table 7.2 shows that:

- Respondents aged under 30 were considerably more likely to be working either entirely or partly in clinical practice, followed by those aged 30-39.
- Respondents with care responsibilities were less likely to be working entirely in clinical practice but were more likely to be working either partly within clinical practice or entirely outside clinical practice.
- Respondents with health conditions were more likely to be working entirely or partly in clinical practice.

**Table 7.2: Involvement in clinical practice by respondent characteristics**

		Entirely within clinical practice		Partly within clinical practice		Entirely outside clinical practice	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Age	Under 30	545	91.6	40	6.7	10	1.7
	30-39	623	80.3	100	12.9	53	6.8
	40-49	347	71.0	71	14.5	71	14.5
	50-59	173	72.7	28	11.8	37	15.5
	60 and over	43	72.9	5	8.5	11	18.6
Care responsibilities	Yes	641	73.7	117	13.4	112	12.9
	No	1,342	83.3	171	10.6	98	6.1
Health conditions	Yes	595	83.6	74	10.4	43	6.0
	No	1,351	78.3	209	12.1	166	9.6

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 7.1 Regional breakdowns

Respondents working in the UK and/or the Republic of Ireland were asked to give more detail about the location of their workplace(s). The data were collected at a standard geographic classification used across Europe, known as the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS)<sup>8</sup>. Data were collected at both the NUTS1 and NUTS3 levels<sup>9</sup>, which enables the mapping of responses.

The results show that:

- Of those who worked within the UK and/or the Republic of Ireland, the large majority (86%) worked in England.
- Only 12 vet nurses who responded to the survey said they worked in the Republic of Ireland.

The data is displayed in

<sup>8</sup> For more detail see: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts>

<sup>9</sup> For more detail see: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/eurostat>

Table 7.3; note that percentages total more than 100 as a small number of respondents worked in more than one country.

**Table 7.3: Main country of work, UK and/or Republic of Ireland**

	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
England	2,498	86.3
Scotland	259	8.9
Wales	143	4.9
Northern Ireland	56	1.9
Republic of Ireland	12	0.4

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

A regional breakdown of responses to where vet nurses work in England is displayed in Table 7.4 and shows:

- The region in which the largest number of vet nurses worked was South-East England (21%), followed by South-West England (16%).
- North-East England (4%) and London (7%) were the least frequently-selected regions.
- A small proportion (2%) said they worked throughout the UK.

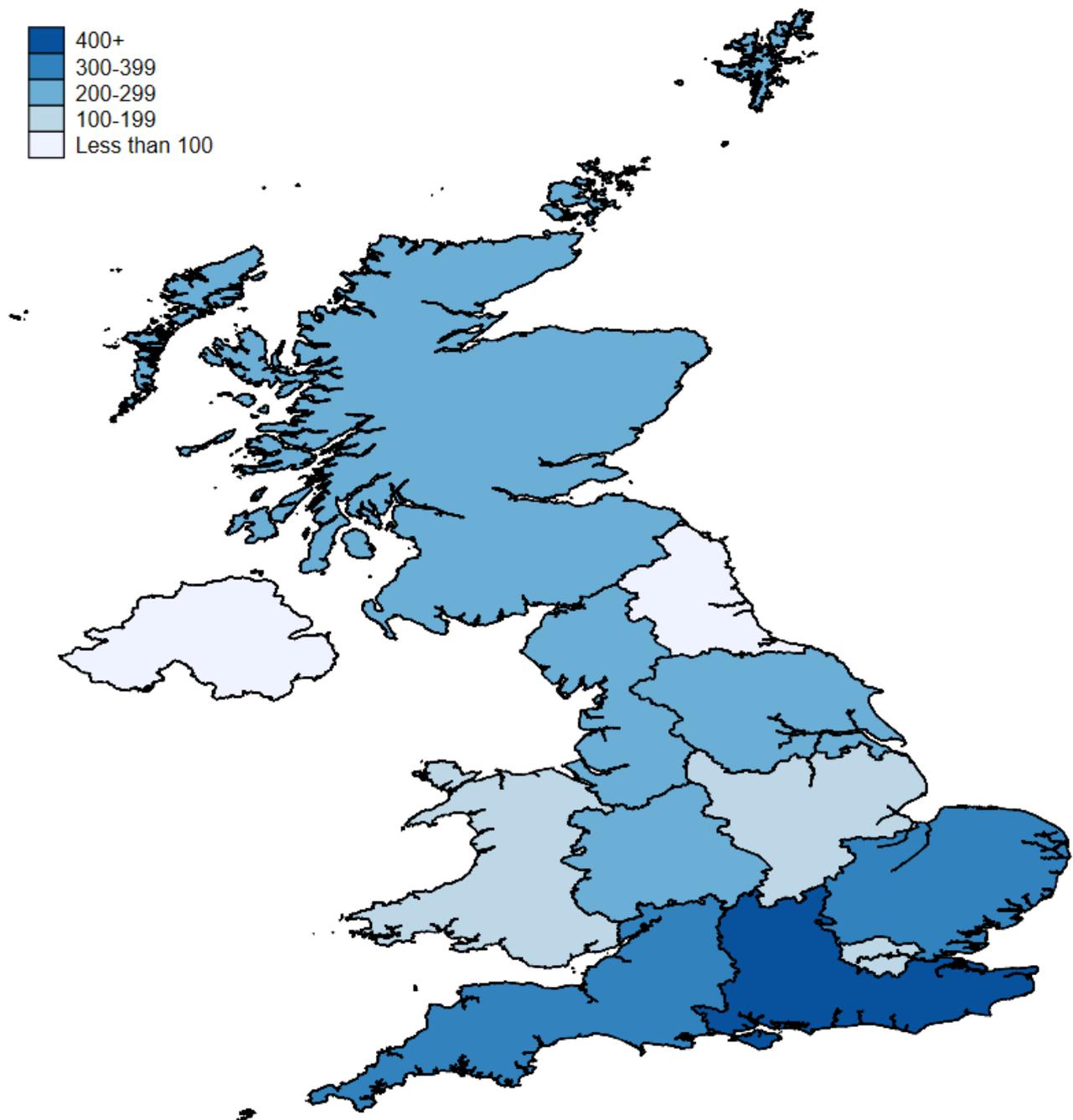
**Table 7.4: Region of work in England**

	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
South-East England	529	21.4
South-West England	397	16.0
East of England	369	14.9
North-West England	288	11.6
West Midlands	245	9.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	241	9.7
East Midlands	200	8.1
London	177	7.1
North-East England	86	3.5
Throughout England	52	2.1

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Figure 7.1 shows the breakdown across the UK at the NUTS1 level, clearly displaying the concentration of vet nurses in the south of England. It is important to note that vet nurses are not concentrated in major population centres, despite the majority carrying out small animal veterinary work.

**Figure 7.1 All vet nurse respondents in work in the UK (NUTS1)**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 7.2 Rural or urban

Over two-fifths (42%) of respondents indicated they were working in a mixture of urban and rural areas, and a further fifth (41%) were working entirely in an urban area. The remaining 17% were working entirely in rural areas.

## 7.3 Work activities

To understand the activities vet nurses performed in clinical practice, respondents indicated how often they performed these tasks on a scale from 'never' to 'every day you are at work'. A full breakdown of responses is displayed in Table 7.5 and illustrates that:

- The three tasks most often performed every day by respondents were administration of medications by injection (80%), clinical cleaning (73%) and dispensing of medication to clients (60%).
- Respondents also said that they monitored anaesthesia (40%), positioned patients for radiography (40%) and took blood samples (38%) several times per week.
- Less regularly, respondents said that they assisted with ultrasounds (31%) and provided nutritional advice (26%) once per week or less.
- Conversely, the three tasks most often 'never' performed by vet nurses were suturing (63%), minor surgery not entering the body cavity (58%) and practice administration (23%).
- Respondents indicated they also rarely assisted during surgical procedures (32%) and conducted dental hygiene work (31%).

**Table 7.5: Frequency of work activities**

	Every day you are at work		Several times per working week		Once per working week or less		Rarely		Never	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Administration of medications by injection	2,257	79.8	363	12.8	100	3.5	83	2.9	26	0.9
Clinical cleaning (e.g. consulting rooms, theatre, instruments)	2,062	73.3	387	13.8	152	5.4	159	5.7	52	1.8
Dispensing of medication to clients	1,690	60.2	694	24.7	184	6.6	170	6.1	70	2.5
Setting up intravenous fluids	1,470	52.1	879	31.1	267	9.5	167	5.9	39	1.4
Caring for hospitalised animals	1,435	50.7	771	27.3	326	11.5	243	8.6	54	1.9
Administration of anaesthetic pre-medication	1,357	48.2	923	32.8	226	8.0	217	7.7	94	3.3
Performing in-house laboratory tests	1,264	45.0	998	35.5	272	9.7	211	7.5	63	2.2
Taking blood samples	1,259	44.8	1,072	38.2	274	9.8	168	6.0	36	1.3
General domestic cleaning (e.g. waiting)	1,123	40.5	603	21.5	362	12.9	473	16.9	245	8.7

---

room, kitchen, corridors)										
Monitoring of anaesthesia	1,125	40.0	1,133	40.3	234	8.3	219	7.8	103	3.7
Teaching/supervising student vet nurses	911	32.5	656	23.4	335	12.0	430	15.3	471	16.8
Nursing clinics/counselling	696	24.8	915	32.6	523	18.6	381	13.6	293	10.4
Practice administration	656	23.5	509	18.3	400	14.3	592	21.2	631	22.6
Assisting during surgical procedures	558	19.9	642	22.9	553	19.7	897	31.9	159	5.7
Reception work	524	18.7	631	22.6	533	19.1	709	25.3	400	14.3
Positioning patients for radiography	408	14.5	1,114	39.6	729	25.9	429	15.2	134	4.8
Nutritional advice/counselling	345	12.4	661	23.8	704	25.3	756	27.2	314	11.3
Assisting with ultrasound	342	12.3	1058	38.0	858	30.8	414	14.9	114	4.1
Dental hygiene work	208	7.4	564	20.1	628	22.4	867	31.0	553	19.0
Minor surgery not entering the body cavity	33	1.2	81	2.9	198	7.1	872	31.2	1,614	57.7
Suturing	12	0.4	38	1.4	155	5.6	838	30.0	1,749	62.6

---

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

---

## 7.4 Clinics

To capture insight into the range of clinics respondents are involved in,

Table 7.6 illustrates that:

- Post-operative checks (77%), nail clipping (76%), and vaccinations (68%) were the clinics respondents were most often involved in.
- Conversely, dental (47%), geriatric/senior wellness (36%) and behaviour (29%) were the three clinics respondents were least involved in.
- 18% of respondents said they were not involved in any nursing clinics.

11% of respondents indicated that they were involved in clinics not listed. These included admits and discharges, arthritis, blood pressure and tests, dermatology, diabetes, laser therapy, mobility, repeat injections and wound care.

**Table 7.6: Nursing clinics respondents were involved in**

	<b>2024 N</b>	<b>2024 %</b>
Post-operative checks	2,170	77.3
Nail clipping	2,121	75.6
Anal gland emptying	1,911	68.1
Vaccination	1,896	67.6
Weight management	1,693	60.3
Nutrition	1,265	54.1
General check-ups	1,517	54.1
Puppy/kitten	1,429	50.9
Dental	1,316	46.9
Geriatric/senior wellness	1,010	36
Behaviour	822	29.3
Other	312	11.1
None	502	17.9

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

## 7.5 Expertise provided

Respondents also identified expertise they had provided to either clients or their employer in the 12 months prior to completing the survey. Data, displayed in

Table 7.7, indicates that:

- Respondents most commonly provided expertise on nail clipping (68%), anal gland emptying (61%) and anaesthesia (61%).
- Conversely, the least common expertise areas provided were dermatology (7%), physio/hydrotherapy (10%) and specific species expertise (17%).
- Around 7% of respondents said they had not provided any specific expertise to clients of their employer in the 12 months prior to the survey.

A small percentage of respondents said they provided expertise in other areas including branch management, cardiology, bereavement counselling, feline nursing, insurance processing, laser therapy, oncology, radiotherapy, surgical nursing and wound management.

**Table 7.7: Expertise provided to clients or employers in the 12 months prior to the survey**

	N	%
Nail clipping	1,854	67.8
Anal gland emptying	1,659	60.7
Anaesthesia	1,656	60.5
Weight management	1,423	52.0
Emergency/critical care	1,361	49.8
Nutrition	1,177	43.0
General/referral nurse clinics	1,116	40.8
Dentistry	1,043	38.1
Quality improvement	943	34.5
Clinical supervisor	873	31.9
Behavioural management	868	31.7
Management	827	30.2
Diabetes	815	29.8
Advising on pet choices	643	23.2
Specific species expertise	471	17.2
Physio/hydrotherapy	272	9.9
Dermatology	196	7.2
Other	166	6.1
None	182	6.7

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 7.6 Position in practice

Respondents were asked to indicate their position in their practice (or their main practice, if working in more than one). Table 7.8 shows that:

- Almost three-fifths of respondents (57%) were nurses, continuing a rising trend seen in 2014 and 2019 data.
- Over a quarter of respondents (29%) were head, deputy or senior nurses, lower than observed in 2019 (32%).
- The proportion of practice managers/administrators and locums also fell compared to 2019 but remained higher than observed in 2014.

A small proportion (3%) of respondents indicated their position was something not listed. Descriptions were frequently a combination of positions, for example, clinical coach and practice manager, nurse and receptionist. However, there were also other responses such as business manager, cattery supervisor, lead of education, and radiographer.

**Table 7.8: Respondent employment status, with comparison to 2019 and 2014 data**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Nurse	1,597	57.0	53.9	52.0
Head nurse/Deputy/Senior nurse	801	28.6	32.0	26.3
Locum	108	3.9	6.3	3.0
Clinical coach	38	3.5	3.5	-
Practice manager/Practice administrator	72	2.6	3.1	5.0
Practice owner/partner/director	36	1.3	1.2	0.8
Independent veterinary nursing service provider	8	0.3	-	-
Other	80	2.9	-	1.7

'-' Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

Further analysis found that respondents without care responsibilities were more likely to be nurses or locums, while respondents with care responsibilities were more likely to indicate they were senior nurses or practice managers.

## 7.7 Practice ownership

Over half (55%) of respondents worked in a practice that was part of a corporate group, and a further 7% worked in practices that were part of a joint venture with a corporate group. Around a quarter (24%) worked in independent, standalone practices, and a further 5% worked in independent practices that were part of a larger group (Table 7.9). A handful of respondents said they worked in practices with other types of ownership. These included veterinary hospitals, universities and 'all of the above'.

**Table 7.9: Ownership of practices in which respondents work**

	N	%
Part of a corporate group	1,516	54.5
Independent, standalone practice	675	24.2
Part of a joint venture with a corporate group	205	7.4
Independent, standalone practice that is part of a larger group	151	5.4
Charity	136	4.9
Veterinary or veterinary nursing school	77	2.8
Other	15	0.5
Don't know	9	0.3

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

The majority of respondents (83%) said their practice was accredited by the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme, while around 11% said their practice was not accredited.

The remaining 6% of respondents said they did not know if the main practice they worked in was accredited.

## 7.8 Working as a locum

Around 13% of respondents indicated that they worked as a locum or independent nursing service provider. The most common reason, selected by nearly half (44%), was for financial reasons (see Table 7.10).

**Table 7.10: Reasons for working as a locum or independent service provider alongside their main role**

	N	%
For financial reasons	291	44.2
Because it suits my personal circumstances	138	21.0
To gain additional experience/expertise	120	18.2
Because it fits with my professional expertise	51	7.8
Because of not being able to find a permanent position offering the flexibility I need	31	4.7
Due to not being able to find a permanent position	4	0.6
Other	23	3.5

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

Further analysis found that respondents without caring responsibilities and those working in veterinary schools were more likely to work as a locum or independent service provider compared to their counterparts.

Over two-fifths (43%) of those who said they worked as a locum or independent service provider said they worked at multiple practices over a month. Within this sample:

- The number of practices worked in per month ranged from two to nine.
- The mean number of practices worked in per month was three, while the modal number of practices worked in per month was two.

## 7.9 Working time on different animals and other practice activities

Survey respondents were asked to indicate what proportion of their time they spend looking after different animals or other practice activities, firstly during their working hours excluding on-call hours, and secondly during their on-call hours. Table 7.11 displays data for both questions and shows that excluding on-call hours:

- Vet nurses spent the largest proportions of their time providing services for dogs (47%) and cats (33%).

- On average, 14% of a vet nurse's time was spent on practice management/administration, 10% on mentoring and training others, and a further 9% on people management.
- Some response options received no responses; these were pigs, laboratory animals, meat hygiene/official controls, and fish for food.

Responses for the on-call time show that:

- Dogs and cats accounted for the largest amount of on-call time at 38% and 24%, respectively.
- While only accounting for 7% of time excluding on-call, vet nurses spent an average of 13% of their time providing services for horses.
- The average amount of time providing care for 'other' species or practice activities was a notably large 16% of on-call time.

**Table 7.11: Percent of vet nurse time spent on particular species, comparison between working time excluding on-call hours, and on-call time**

	Working time (excluding on-call)		On-call time	
	N	Mean % of time	N	Mean % of time
Dogs	2,495	46.9	859	38.0
Cats	2,496	33.4	831	23.8
Practice management/administration	1,020	14.2	302	4.9
Mentoring and training others	1,072	9.5	291	1.7
People management	858	9.0	308	5.5
Small animals (e.g. rabbits, mice, gerbils, hamsters, rats, chinchillas)	2,098	7.4	513	3.8
Horses (excluding Official Veterinarian (OV) work)	668	6.7	317	13.4
Exotics	1,072	2.8	346	1.3
Wild animals	885	2.3	322	1.3
Zoo animals	684	0.8	285	0.8
Beef cattle (excluding OV)	606	0.5	276	0.3
Poultry	620	0.4	272	0.1
Dairy cattle (excluding OV)	596	0.3	272	0.3
Sheep (excluding OV)	600	0.2	280	0.3
Official Veterinarian (OV) work	551	0.1	265	0.0
Pigs (excluding OV)	562	0.0	267	0.0
Laboratory animals	554	0.0	266	0.0
Meat hygiene/official controls	549	0.0	266	0.0
Fish for food	546	0.0	266	0.0
Other	446	1.9	320	15.7

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 7.10 Routine visits

The majority of respondents (87%) did not carry out routine visits to clients (Table 7.12). 13% said they carried out routine visits to clients, down from what was previously a stable 15%.

**Table 7.12: Provide routine visits to clients?**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Yes	343	12.9	14.8	14.9
No	2312	87.1	85.2	85.1

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

Further analysis identified that respondents working in independent practices and practices that are part of corporate groups were notably more likely to carry out routine visits to clients (18% and 12% respectively) than those working in charities or veterinary schools (2% and 3% respectively).

## 7.11 Remote services

Only a small percentage (6%) of respondents said they provided remote services to clients. This small group of respondents were asked further questions about the remote services they provided. Table 7.13 illustrates that:

- The majority of these respondents (82%) provided remote counselling or advice, and over half (51%) provided tele-triage.
- One-fifth of these respondents provided other remote services, including behaviour consultations, medicine administration, and taking payments.

**Table 7.13: Remote services provided to clients**

	2024 N	2024 %
Remote consulting/advice	129	81.6
Tele-triage	81	51.3
Other	32	20.3

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further analysis identified that respondents working for charities were significantly more likely to provide remote services to clients than those from other practice types.

Table 7.14 shows that, of the small proportion who provided any remote services, three-quarters provided up to one-quarter of their services remotely, while a further 15% provided between one-quarter and one-half remotely.

**Table 7.14: Proportion of clinical veterinary nursing work provided remotely**

	2024 N	2024 %
None to one-quarter	121	75.2
Between one-quarter and one-half	24	14.9
Between one-half and three-quarters	12	7.5
Between three-quarters and all	4	2.5

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Following this, respondents were asked to indicate how their current levels of remote working compare to their levels of remote working both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Table 7.15 indicates that:

- 60% of respondents provided more remote services at the time of completing the survey than before the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Two-thirds of respondents provided fewer remote services at the time of completing the survey than they did during the pandemic.

Respondents indicated that three-fifths (60%) of respondents who provided any remote services provided more or much more remote services now than before the Covid-19 pandemic, while around two-thirds (66%) provided less or much less remote support now than during the pandemic.

**Table 7.15: How remote working now compares to before and during the Covid-19 pandemic**

	Before		During	
	N	%	N	%
Much less now	17	11.0	62	40.3
Less now	8	5.2	40	26.0
No difference	36	23.4	21	13.6
More now	68	44.2	21	13.6
Much more now	25	16.2	10	6.5

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Table 7.16 shows that four-fifths of respondents who provided any remote services said they provided these services within their local area, and a further 9% said they provided these services in the county they are based in. A smaller proportion (4%) of respondents provided remote services across the whole of the UK.

A small handful of respondents said they provided remote services to other areas, which was limited to registered clients only.

**Table 7.16: Locations where vet nurses provided remote services**

	2024 N	2024 %
The local area	126	80.3
The UK county in which I'm based	14	8.9
The wider UK region in which I'm based	2	1.3
The whole UK country in which I'm based	*	*
The UK	6	3.8
Internationally including the UK	3	1.9
Anywhere in the world	*	*
Other	4	2.5

*\*\* Denotes fewer than three responses to this category.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

## 7.12 Emergency cover

Respondents outlined their practices' approach to providing 24/7 emergency cover.

Table 7.17 shows that:

- Over half (52%) of practices used a dedicated out-of-hours service provider, an increase from 44% in 2019.
- One-third of practices covered their own out-of-hours work, with 32% using their own vets and the remaining 1% using locums, both decreasing on 2019 data.
- 6% of practices used a mixture of these two approaches.
- 4% of practices were primarily or wholly out-of-hours service providers.

A very small proportion (2%) of respondents said their practice had other approaches to providing 24/7 emergency care. These were mostly from locums who said the approach to 24/7 care varied depending on the practice in which they were working.

**Table 7.17: Practice approaches to emergency cover**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %
Practice uses a dedicated out-of-hours service provider	1,373	51.6	44.2
Practice generally covers its own out-of-hours work, using its own vets	847	31.8	42.4
A mixture	160	6.0	-
Practice is primarily or wholly an out-of-hours provider	110	4.1	5.0
Practice co-operates with other local practices to share out-of-hours work	39	1.5	2.9
Practice generally covers its own out-of-hours work, using locums	38	1.4	1.7
Don't know	5	0.2	0.7
Other	48	1.8	3.1
Not applicable – practice doesn't provide an out-of-hours service	41	1.5	-

'-' Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Respondents who indicated that their practice does not provide an out-of-hours service were asked why this was the case. The most common response was related to staffing, with many saying it was not possible to cover out-of-hours care with their existing staffing levels, and out-of-hours jobs are difficult to recruit for.

## 7.13 Out-of-hours working

Over one-third of respondents (37%) indicated that they personally did out-of-hours work. Within this population, 13% said this included visits to clients.

**Table 7.18: Respondents' out-of-hours work**

		2024 N	2024 %
Do you personally do any out-of-hours work?	Yes	995	37.1
	No	1,685	62.9
Does this include visits to clients?	Yes	127	12.8
	No	868	87.2

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further analysis found that:

- Over half of males (52%) worked out-of-hours, while around one-third (37%) of females did so.
- Out-of-hours work decreased as age increased.
- Fewer than one-third of respondents (32%) with care responsibilities worked out-of-hours, compared to over two-fifths (41%) of respondents without care responsibilities.

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents working in veterinary nursing education providers (63%) said they work out-of-hours, compared to between one-third and 43% of respondents working in other settings.
- Practice managers/administrators and practice owners were the least likely to work out-of-hours.

Following this, Table 7.19 illustrates how many times respondents personally dealt with emergency cases out-of-hours, in a typical month.

- Respondents attended considerably more emergencies in-person at the practice, than away from the practice or remotely, with an average of 26 cases per month.
- Responses to all three options ranged greatly.

**Table 7.19: Typical number of out-of-hours cases in a typical month**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Range</b>
In-person, away from the practice	90	5.2	1	168
In person, at the practice	108	26.3	5	250
Remotely	53	5.8	0	75

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 7.14 Rest periods and holiday

Over half (52%) of respondents said that they always received a minimum rest period of 11 hours in each 24-hour period, in line with the working time regulations. A further 41% said they usually got this minimum rest period.

A small proportion (7%) of respondents said they seldom or never received this rest period. Responses are displayed in full in Table 7.20.

**Table 7.20: How often respondents receive a minimum rest period of 11 hours**

	<b>2024 N</b>	<b>2024 %</b>
Always	1,170	52.2
Usually	911	40.6
Seldom	113	5.0
Never	49	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,243</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further analysis identified that over half of respondents at each practice ownership type always received the minimum rest break; however, those working for charities were most likely to say they always received this rest break.

The majority of respondents also said they always had at least two days' rest every 14 days. Table 7.21 shows that:

- 80% of respondents always had at least two days rest every 14 days, and a further 18% usually had this rest time.
- A small proportion (2%) of respondents seldom or never had two rest days every 14 days.

**Table 7.21: How often respondents have at least two rest days every 14 days**

	2024 N	2024 %
Always	2,004	79.9
Usually	462	18.4
Seldom	30	1.2
Never	13	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,509</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Respondents were also asked whether they had either signed up to or discussed, a workforce agreement with their employer that provided compensatory rest. Table 7.22 shows that:

- Around 10% of respondents have signed up to a workforce agreement.
- A further 9% have discussed a workforce agreement with their employer.

**Table 7.22: Signed up to or discussed a workforce agreement**

		2024 N	2024 %
Signed up to a workforce agreement	Yes	128	9.5
	No	1,223	90.5
Discussed a workforce agreement	Yes	191	9.3
	No	1,869	90.7

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Finally, almost all (97%) of respondents said they received at least 20 days of paid holiday per year, including bank holidays (pro rata for part timers).

## 7.15 Practice staffing

Table 7.23 shows that the average number of full-time-equivalent vet and vet nurses in the respondent's workplace fell compared to 2019 data, to a level similar to that observed in the 2014 survey.

**Table 7.23: Practice staffing levels**

	Mode	2024 Mean	2019 Mean	2014 Mean
Veterinary surgeons	3	6.8	7.6	6.7
Veterinary nurses	2	7.8	8.4	7.5
Veterinary nurse students	1	2.2	2.2	-

'-' Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

## 7.16 Harassment and bullying

Over half of respondents (52%) said that they had not experienced harassment or bullying from either clients or colleagues in the 12 months prior to completing the survey. However, almost two-fifths of respondents (39%) said they had experienced it from clients, and a further fifth (21%) from colleagues. Table 7.24 shows a breakdown of these results.

**Table 7.24: Harassment and bullying**

	2024 N	2024 %
From clients	955	39.3
From colleagues	517	21.2
None of the above	1,252	51.5

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further analysis exploring responses by participant characteristics identified that:

- Male respondents were more likely to report experiencing harassment or bullying from both clients and colleagues (43% and 24% respectively) compared to females at 38% and 22% from clients and colleagues, respectively.
- 29% of gay/lesbian respondents (26) and 23% of bisexual respondents (35) reported experiencing bullying or harassment from clients, compared to 21% of heterosexual vet nurses (444).
- Over half (54%) of bisexual respondents reported experiencing bullying/harassment from colleagues, compared to 49% of gay/lesbian respondents, and 38% of heterosexual respondents.
- Respondents aged 39 and under were more likely to report experiencing bullying/harassment from clients (44% of those under 30 and 40% of respondents 30-39) compared to older respondents (40-49, 35%; 50-59, 37%; 60-69, 26%).
- People without caring responsibilities indicated that they experienced bullying or harassment from clients and colleagues (42% and 24% respectively) more than respondents with caring responsibilities (33% and 18%, respectively).

- Respondents with health conditions were considerably more likely to report experiencing bullying or harassment from both clients and colleagues (51% and 35% respectively) than respondents without health conditions (33% and 17% respectively).
- Those working in charities were notably more likely to report experiencing harassment or bullying from clients than respondents working in other settings (charities, 51%; corporates, 40%; independent practices, 39%; veterinary school, 11%).

Respondents who said they had experienced bullying or harassment at work were asked to state how many times this had happened in the 12 months prior to completing the survey. Table 7.25 shows the mean number of incidents for each, physical, verbal and other bullying/harassment from both clients and colleagues and indicates that:

- On average, participants experienced a higher number of incidents of harassment or bullying from clients than colleagues.
- Verbal harassment or bullying was the most frequent type experienced from both clients and colleagues.
- The modal number of incidents was highest for verbal harassment or bullying from colleagues.

**Table 7.25: Types of bullying and harassment received from clients and colleagues in the previous 12 months (number of times experienced)**

	From clients			From colleagues		
	N	Mean	Mode	N	Mean	Mode
Verbal	904	19.8	5	461	11.5	10
Physical	56	3.6	1	22	2.8	1
Other	156	17.8	2	112	12.5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>917</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>10</b>

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

Table 7.26 shows that when asked whether and how bullying or harassment had been reported:

- Over half (52%) of respondents did not formally report bullying or harassment from clients, while this was the case for only one-third (37%) of incidents of bullying or harassment from colleagues.
- Around two-fifths (39%) of incidents from clients were reported to the practice, while one-fifth (21%) were reported to the police.
- Incidents from colleagues were much more likely to be reported to the practice than incidents from clients; however, incidents from colleagues were less likely to be reported to the police.

**Table 7.26: Reporting bullying or harassment**

	From clients		From colleagues	
	N	%	N	%
Reported to the practice	955	39.3	633	67.3
Reported to the police	517	21.2	96	10.2
Not formally reported	1,252	51.5	344	36.6

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

Further analysis identified that respondents working in corporate groups were more likely to report incidents of bullying or harassment to both their practice and the police than respondents working in other practice types.

## 8 Recently qualified vet nurses

This chapter focuses on recently qualified vet nurses (2021 onwards) working in the veterinary profession, covering their first role since qualifying, any appraisals or reviews and how their university experience has prepared them for work in the veterinary profession.

### Chapter summary

- 94% of recent qualifiers (since 2021) were female and 5% male.
- Over two-fifths (43%) found a position after approaching just one practice. However, 16% approached more than 10 practices before finding their first position.
- Three-fifths (60%) remained employed in their training practice after qualifying.
- Two-thirds (66%) had received appraisals and/or performance reviews while they were a student, whilst around three-quarters (72%) were receiving or had received appraisals in their first post-qualification position.
- With regard to the quality of their experience during their veterinary nursing education, 77% were satisfied/very satisfied with the quality of training practice experiences, 68% were satisfied/very satisfied with the support they received during clinical placements, and 63% were satisfied/very satisfied with the quality of their college/university experience (Note that the Covid pandemic may have had an impact on these results, notably the college/university experience).
- Recent qualifiers felt that their university or college course had best prepared them with 'knowledge and understanding' and 'professionalism and professional integrity'; each of these aspects scored more than four out of five. However, they felt least prepared for 'financial and business management', where the score was 2.4 out of five.
- Over two-thirds (69%) of recent qualifiers agreed or strongly agreed that the curriculum had prepared them for working in the veterinary nursing profession.

### 8.1 Respondent profile

In total, 940 respondents had qualified since 2021. Similar to the overall survey respondent profile, the majority of newly qualified vet nurses (94%) were female. A further 5% were male and a small proportion (>1%) selected another gender. Due to the disparity in group sizes, analysis within this chapter by gender was not able to produce meaningful findings.

### 8.2 First post-qualification post

When exploring entry to the veterinary nursing profession, respondents were first asked to say how many practices they approached before finding a position. Table 8.1 shows that:

- Over two-fifths (43%) of respondents found a position after approaching just one practice.
- A further third (30%) found their first post after approaching between two and five practices.
- Around 16% approached more than 10 practices before finding their first position.

**Table 8.1: ‘How many practices did you approach before finding a position?’**

	2024 N	2024 %
One	315	42.9
Two to five	218	29.7
Six to ten	86	11.7
Eleven to twenty	53	7.2
Over twenty	62	8.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>734</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Three-fifths (60%) remained employed in their training practice after qualifying. Table 8.2 also shows that:

- Over a quarter (28%) moved from their training practice to another practice.
- More respondents moved on to a postgraduate role at a different clinical practice to their training practice, than those who became employed where they studied.
- ‘Other’ totalled 3% of responses, and included working as a locum, leaving the profession and taking a career break.

**Table 8.2: ‘When you qualified, what did you do?’<sup>10</sup>**

	2024 N	2024 %
Remained employed at your training practice	443	59.9
Moved from your training practice to another practice	207	28.0
Started working at a clinical practice other than that one you trained in	43	5.8
Started working at the clinical practice where you trained	27	3.7
Other	19	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>739</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

<sup>10</sup> Planned analysis by gender and country of qualification was not possible due to large disparities between group sizes.

Finally, around two-thirds of respondents indicated that they were still in their first post-qualification position at the time of the survey. Those who had left their first post-qualification position were asked how long they had stayed in that post:

- Responses ranged from one to 73 months.
- The mean number of months in their first post was 10 months.
- The mode number of months was 12 months.
- The standard deviation within responses from the mean was nine months.

### 8.3 Appraisals and performance reviews

Table 8.3 shows that two-thirds of respondents had received appraisals and/or performance reviews while they were a student, whilst around 72% were receiving or had received appraisals in their first post-qualification position<sup>11</sup>.

**Table 8.3 Receive appraisals and/or performance reviews**

	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
As a student	317	65.5	137	34.5
In first post-qualification position	345	71.6	167	28.4

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

### 8.4 Experience of veterinary nursing education

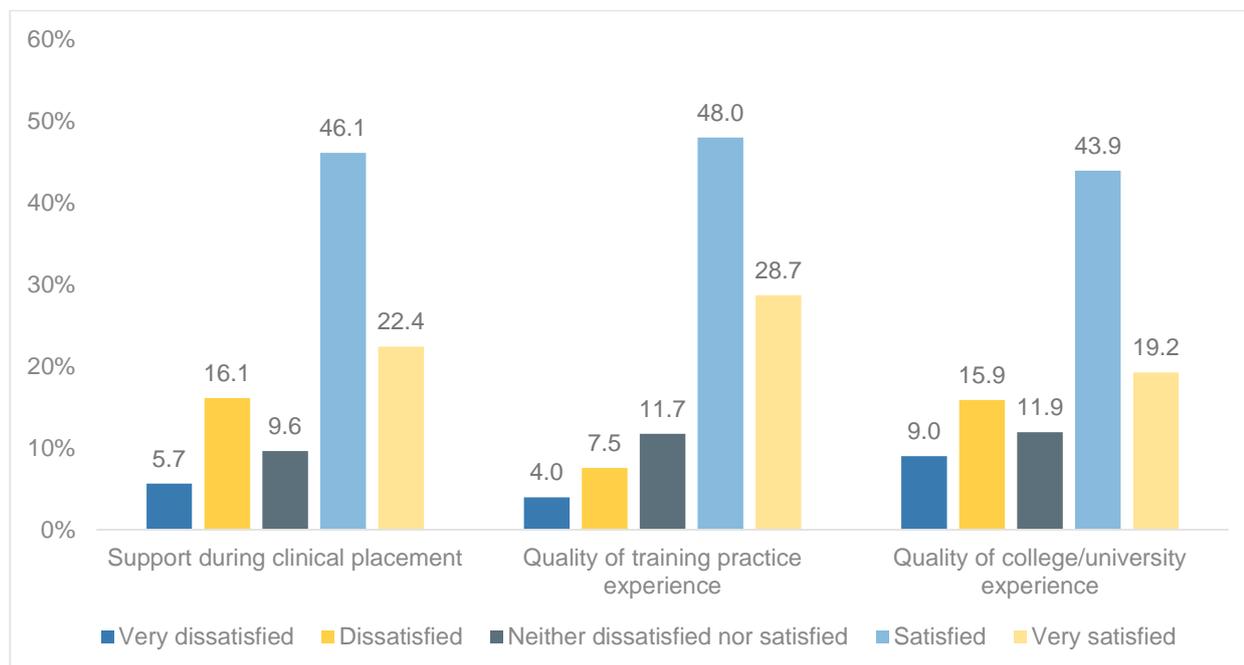
Recent qualifiers were asked a series of questions about their experiences of their veterinary nursing education, specifically related to their level of satisfaction with:

- The support they received during their clinical placement.
- The quality of their training practice experience.
- The quality of their college/university experience.

Figure 8.1 shows:

- At least 63% were satisfied or very satisfied with each of the three statements.
- Quality of training practice experience had the highest level of satisfaction, with 77% of recent qualifiers saying they were either satisfied or very satisfied.
- The statement with the highest level of dissatisfaction was quality of college or university experience, with one quarter (25%) indicating they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their experience.

<sup>11</sup> Analysis by subgroup on these questions was conducted, however highlighted no statistically significant results.

**Figure 8.1: Satisfaction with university experience**

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Table 8.4 shows the mean scores for the three statements. The quality of college/university experience having the lowest mean score might be explained by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which may have impacted the education experiences of some recent qualifiers.

**Table 8.4: Mean scores for college/university experience statements**

	Mean score
Support during clinical placement	3.6
Quality of training practice experience	3.9
Quality of college/university experience	3.5

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 8.5 How well the course prepared vet nurses for their role

Table 8.5 shows that the two areas recent qualifiers felt their course best prepared them for were *'knowledge and understanding'* and *'professionalism and professional integrity'*, each with mean scores of above 4. *'Communication, collaboration and empathy'* and *'Clinical skills'* also had high mean scores, both above 3.5. *'Financial and business management'* had the lowest mean score (2.4), with over 60% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that their course prepared them for this.

**Table 8.5: Level of agreement that the course prepares for a role in the profession**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Knowledge and understanding	0.9	3.4	7.0	53.0	35.7	4.2
Professionalism and professional integrity	1.7	4.7	10.3	50.5	32.7	4.1
Communication, collaboration and empathy	1.6	9.2	19.8	47.6	21.9	3.8
Clinical skills	3.1	15.4	12.6	46.9	22.0	3.7
Clinical decision making	3.9	19.5	21.0	40.6	15.0	3.4
Ability to deal with uncertainty and change	7.2	20.0	25.3	36.6	10.9	3.2
Financial and business management	21.9	39.3	23.0	11.7	4.1	2.4

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further, Table 8.6 shows that over two-thirds of new graduates felt the curriculum prepared them for working in the veterinary nursing profession. The mean score for this question was 3.6.

**Table 8.6: How well participants felt their curriculum prepared them for the veterinary nursing profession**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
I felt the curriculum prepared me for the veterinary nursing profession	3.8	10.6	16.3	58.7	10.5	3.6

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 9 Views about the veterinary nursing profession

This chapter outlines views about the veterinary nursing profession from respondents, covering working conditions, scientific research and quality improvement, standards and learning, and the value and recognition of veterinary nurses.

### Chapter summary

- Vet nurses were asked about the extent to which they agreed with a series of 16 attitudinal statements about the veterinary profession.
- The statements attracting the strongest level of agreement overall were that: veterinary nursing work was stressful (scoring 4.5 out of 5), clients valued the work of vets (4.0), veterinary work gave job satisfaction (3.9), and the respondents were familiar with the concept of quality improvement (3.5).
- The statements attracting a negative response overall were that: the respondent had participated in scientific research over the past five years (2.4), the veterinary nursing profession offered good opportunities for career progression (2.6), the veterinary profession paid sufficient attention to the development of leadership skills (2.6), clients valued the work of vet nurses (2.7), the veterinary profession paid sufficient attention to its environmental footprint (2.7), and the veterinary profession offered good opportunities for those wishing to work flexibly (2.7).
- The other six statements about the profession attracted neutral to somewhat positive scores between 3.1 and 3.4, namely that: vet nurses were valued by the veterinary profession (3.4), the profession had a culture of learning from mistakes (3.3), the profession was diverse and inclusive (3.3), newly qualified vet nurses had the necessary skills required for clinical practice employment from day one (3.3), the respondent felt able to critically appraise a research study (3.2) and the profession nurtured innovation (3.1).
- There were some differences in response patterns compared to vets. In particular, vets were notably more likely to have participated in scientific research (3.7), and to believe that vet nurses were valued by the profession (3.7) and by clients (3.1). Vets were notably less likely to believe that clients valued the work of vets (3.5).
- A further set of 13 statements asked for views about their work within the profession, including their workplace. Only one of these statements, relating to the respondent's satisfaction with their salary/remuneration level, attracted a negative response (2.5 out of 5).
- Six statements yielded a positive response, namely that: the respondent was familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine (4.4), was able to be themselves in the workplace (3.9), felt comfortable reporting and sharing mistakes in the workplace (3.8), the workplace allowed them to deliver the best possible outcomes to their patients (3.6), the respondent actively used published evidence as part of their clinical decision-making (3.6), and they were satisfied with the support given by others in the workplace (3.6).

- The remaining four statements attracted a moderately positive response between 3.3 and 3.4, namely that: they actively used quality improvement in their practice (3.4), they were satisfied with the support given by their line manager (3.4), they were allowed by their workplace to exercise clinical freedom (3.3) and their vet colleagues delegated tasks appropriately under Schedule 3 (3.3).
- The responses of vets were broadly similar to those of vet nurses, although vets were somewhat more satisfied with support from their line manager (3.5) and others in the workplace (3.9), and felt notably more able to exercise their clinical freedom (4.1).
- When asked if, should they have the opportunity to start their career again, they would still choose to work within the veterinary nursing profession, 42% said yes and 29% no; 29% were uncertain. A higher proportion said yes in 2019 (51%). A similar question to vets yielded a slightly more positive response, in that 47% said yes.
- Working with animals (94%), making a difference (64%) and job satisfaction (49%) were, as in 2019, the top three best things about being in the profession. These were broadly similar to the choices made by vets, although vets had challenge/stimulus as their second choice.
- Poor financial reward (66%) and stress levels (47%) remained in the top three main challenges facing the veterinary nursing profession, alongside staff shortages (51%), a newly introduced option for 2024. Vets' top three challenges were somewhat different: client expectations/demands, stress levels and the affordability of veterinary services.
- Similar to 2019, better financial reward (78%), more respect/recognition from the public (54%), better work-life balance (44%) and better opportunities for career progression (44%) were the top things that respondents considered would improve the profession. Although vets also put better financial reward at the top, their second choice was less workload pressure.

## 9.1 General views about the veterinary nursing profession

Respondents were asked to share their views on the profession by indicating the extent to which they agreed with a series of 16 attitudinal statements about the veterinary nursing profession. Each statement used a five-point scale to capture responses ranging from 'strongly disagree' (scoring 1) to 'strongly agree' (scoring 5), with a mid-point score of 3. Five of the statements were also featured in the 2019 and 2014 surveys. Within this chapter, views have been grouped, where appropriate, into themes with comparison to vet responses.

Appendix Table 12.1 provides the full results for these 16 statements, including the percentage spread across responses and the mean score for each statement.

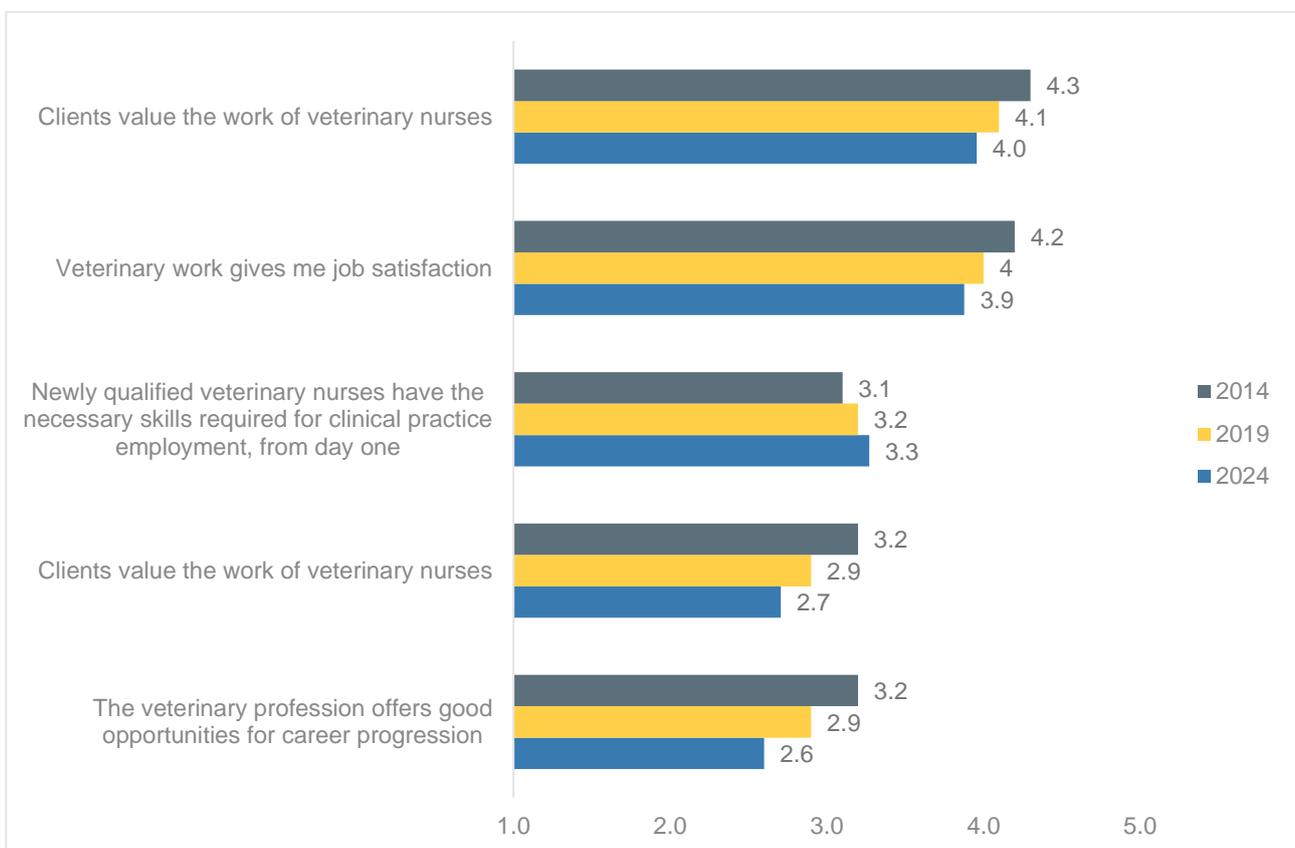
### 9.1.1 Comparison to previous years

Figure 9.1 provides the mean scores for the five common statements across the 2014, 2019 and 2024 surveys and shows:

- Across four of the five statements it is apparent that there is a downward trend, indicating that vet nurses are increasingly disagreeing with the statements presented to them.

- Despite their slow downward trend, the statements ‘clients value the work of veterinary nurses’ and ‘veterinary work gives me job satisfaction’ maintain high average scores.
- Respondents provided the lowest mean score to the statement related to career progression; however this remains neutral to negative, with a mean score of 2.6, with only 27% agreeing with the statement.
- The only statement to have an increase in its mean score is around newly qualified vet nurses having the necessary skills from day one of employment (53% of respondents agreed), suggesting that training is preparing students well for the world of work.

**Figure 9.1: General views about the veterinary nursing profession: mean scores, 2024 compared to 2019 and 2014**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

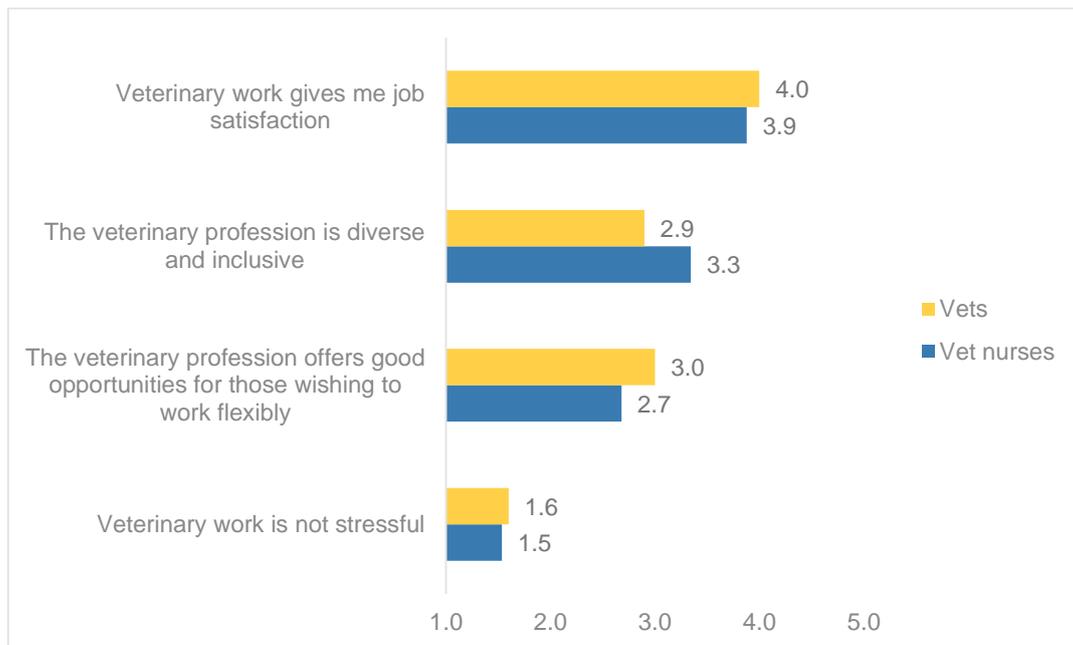
### 9.1.2 Views on working conditions

Figure 9.2 displays the mean responses to statements, with a comparison to vet responses. This shows that:

- Respondents received a degree of job satisfaction from working in the veterinary profession, with a mean score of nearly four (75% agreed or strongly agreed).
- Respondents were less sure whether the profession offers good opportunities for those wishing to work flexibly, or whether the profession is diverse and inclusive, with responses to each of these statements averaging at around the mid-point.

- There is a relatively strong level of disagreement that the profession is not stressful. Vets agreed to a slightly greater extent compared to vet nurses that the profession offers good opportunities to those who want to work flexibly, however, agreed slightly less that the veterinary surgeon profession is diverse and inclusive.

**Figure 9.2: Views about working conditions in the profession: mean scores, with comparison to vets**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession & RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2024

Further analysis indicated differences between respondent groups.

- Respondents aged 49 and under agreed less that the profession offers good opportunities for those wishing to work flexibly than those 50 and over.
- Respondents aged 39 and under agreed less that the profession is diverse and inclusive than those over 40.
- Respondents aged 30-39 reported the lowest agreement that the profession gives them job satisfaction, while those aged 50 and over provided the highest agreement.
- Respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds gave a lower mean level of agreement that the profession is diverse and inclusive.
- Individuals with health conditions agreed less that the profession offers good opportunities for those wishing to work flexibly.
- Respondents who did not report having health conditions had higher levels of agreement that veterinary work is not stressful.
- Those without health conditions agreed more that the profession provides them with job satisfaction.

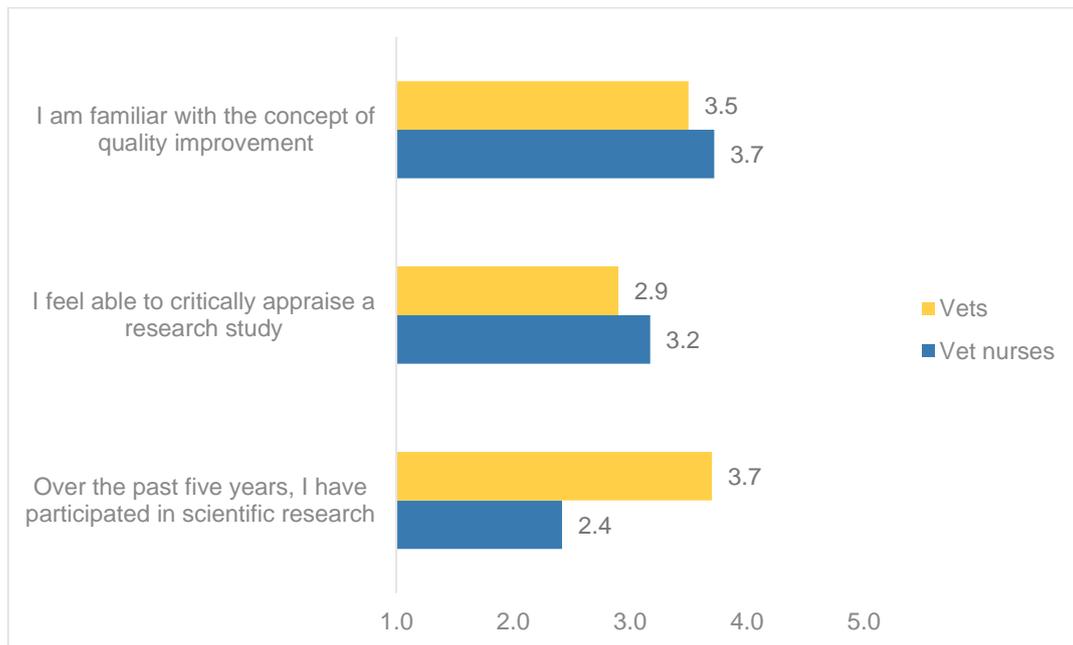
- Those with care responsibilities had higher levels of agreement that veterinary work is not stressful.
- Respondents working within clinical practice agreed more that the profession is diverse and inclusive.
- Full-time workers agreed less that the profession provides good opportunities for flexible working.
- Individuals who said they have worked as a locum or independent service provider agreed less that the profession is diverse and inclusive.
- Respondents who qualified post-2021 agreed more that the profession offers good opportunities for those wishing to work flexibly, and that the profession is diverse and inclusive.
- Respondents who qualified before 2021 agreed more that the profession is not stressful, however, indicated it provided them with job satisfaction.
- Respondents planning to leave the profession agreed less with all four statements around working conditions.

### **9.1.3 Views about scientific research and quality improvement**

To statements exploring views on scientific research and quality improvement data, displayed in Figure 9.3, indicates:

- Respondents were neutral about their ability to critically appraise a research study.
- There was a slight level of agreement amongst respondents that they are familiar with the concept of quality improvement.
- Vets were much more likely to agree they had participated in scientific research, however, vet nurses agreed slightly more that they felt able to critically appraise research and that they were familiar with the concept of quality improvement.

**Figure 9.3: Views about scientific research and quality improvement: mean scores, with comparison to vets**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession & RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2024

Further analysis was conducted to explore responses by group:

- Males were both more likely to agree that they had participated in scientific research in the past five years and to feel they could critically appraise a research study.
- Respondents aged 30-39 agreed most that they were familiar with the concept of quality improvement, while those aged 60 and over agreed the least.
- Respondents aged 30 and under and between 50 and 59 agreed most that they felt able to critically appraise a research study, while those aged 40-49 and 60 and over agreed the least.
- Respondents from ethnic minority groups agreed most that they had participated in scientific research.
- Respondents with caring responsibilities felt they were less able to critically appraise a research study.
- Those working outside the profession agreed more that they feel able to critically appraise a research study.
- Those working outside of clinical practice provided higher scores for all three statements around scientific research and quality improvement.
- Full-time respondents agreed more with all three statements around scientific research and quality improvement.

- Respondents who had worked as a locum or independent service provider were more likely to have participated in scientific research in the five years prior to completing the survey.
- Individuals who qualified post-2021 agreed they felt more able to critically appraise a research study to a greater extent than those who qualified pre-2021.
- Respondents who said they were planning to stay in the profession for five or more years agreed that they were familiar with the concept of quality improvement.

#### 9.1.4 Views on veterinary standards and learning

Figure 9.4 displays mean scores from all respondents to statements focused on standards within the veterinary profession, and ongoing learning. This shows:

- The statements that newly qualified vets have the necessary skills from day one of employment, and that the profession has a culture of sharing and learning from mistakes had the highest level of agreement amongst vet nurses, who also agreed more than vets.
- The statements that vet nurses agreed with least were that the profession pays attention to the development of leadership skills and that the profession offers good opportunities for career progression.
- Vets have a more neutral mean than vet nurses when considering opportunities for career progression, while the opposite is observed when considering the skill sets of newly qualified vets.

**Figure 9.4: Views on veterinary standards and learning within the profession: mean scores, with comparison to vets**



For the second statement, vet nurses were asked ‘Newly qualified veterinary nurses have the necessary skills required for clinical practice employment, from day one’ and vets were asked ‘Newly qualified veterinary surgeons have the necessary skills required for clinical practice employment, from day one’.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession & RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2024

Analysis exploring the differences in responses by groups found that:

- Females tended to agree more that the profession offers good progression opportunities.
- Agreement that the profession shares and learns from mistakes and nurtures innovation, and that newly qualified vets have necessary skills, fell incrementally as respondent age category increased.
- Respondents aged 30-49 had the lowest level of agreement that the profession pays sufficient attention to the development of leadership skills, while those under 30 reported the highest mean agreement.
- Respondents aged 30-39 agreed the least that the profession offers good opportunities for career progression, while those over 60 had the highest mean agreement score.
- Those aged under 30 and between 50-59 have the highest level of agreement that the profession pays sufficient attention to its environmental footprint, while all other age groups agree slightly lower.

- 
- Respondents with no health conditions had a higher mean level of agreement with all three statements around veterinary standards and learning within the profession.
  - Respondents without caring responsibilities indicated the highest mean level of agreement that the profession has a culture of sharing and learning from mistakes.
  - All statements, aside from that the profession nurtures innovation, received a higher mean response from those working within the profession.
  - Analysis did not indicate a statistical significance by whether an individual was working within or outside of the profession for the remaining statement.
  - Respondents working outside clinical practice tended to have higher mean levels of agreement that the profession has a culture of sharing and learning from mistakes.
  - Those working outside clinical practice agreed most that the profession offers good opportunities for career progression, and that newly qualified vets have the necessary skills to enter employment.
  - Full-time respondents gave a higher mean level of agreement that the profession: has a culture of sharing and learning from mistakes, nurtures innovation, and pays sufficient attention to its environmental footprint.
  - Excluding views on newly qualified vets' skill sets (for which analysis did not highlight any statistically significant differences), locums and independent service providers provide lower mean scores across all statements related to veterinary standards and learning.
  - Respondents who qualified post-2021 agreed most with all statements exploring views on veterinary standards and learning.
  - Respondents who qualified in the UK agreed most that newly qualified vets have the necessary skills required for clinical practice from day one of employment.
  - Excluding views on newly qualified vets' skill sets, those planning to leave the profession reported the lowest mean level of agreement with statements around veterinary standards and learning.
  - Both those planning to leave the profession and those planning to retire provided the same average score on newly qualified vets' skill sets, which was lower than the mean score reported by those planning to stay in the profession.

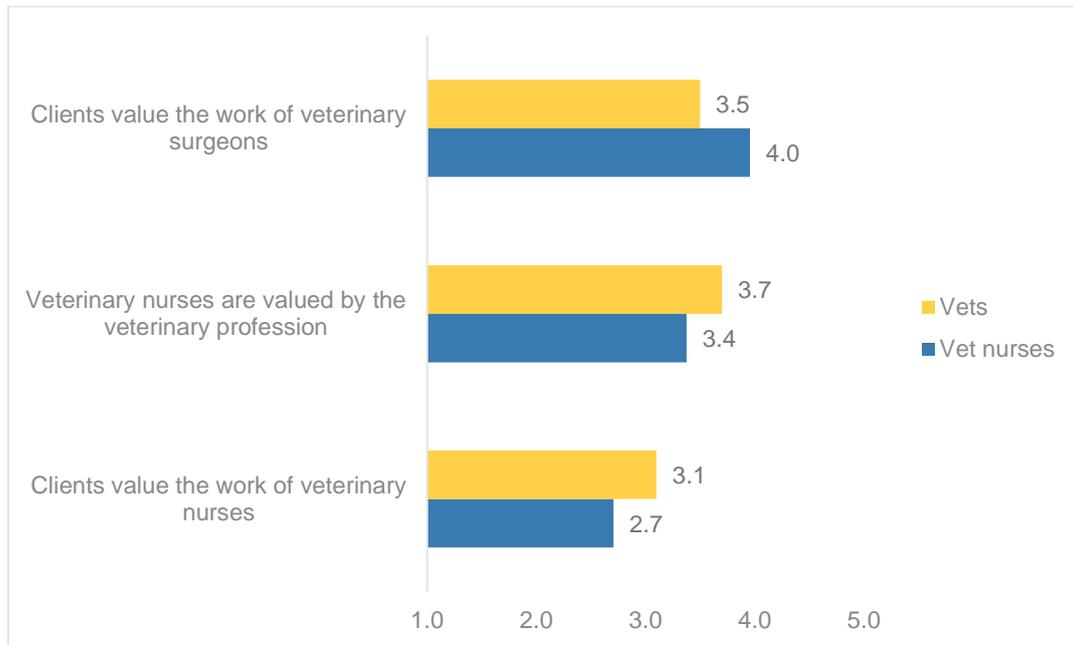
### 9.1.5 Value and recognition

The final remaining statements focused on value and recognition within the profession. Figure 9.5 shows that:

- There was a considerable difference between views on client value for vets and client value for vet nurses, with mean scores of 4.0 and 2.7, respectively. Four-fifths (80%) of vet nurses agreed or strongly agreed that clients value vets, compared to only 28% who felt the same way about the recognition of vet nurses.

- Vets agreed more that both clients and the profession value vet nurses, while vet nurses agreed more with the statement that clients value the work of vets compared to a similar statement about valuing vet nurses.

**Figure 9.5: Views on value and recognition within the profession: mean scores, with comparison to vets**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession & RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2024

Further analysis exploring views on value and recognition within the profession found significant differences between some group responses.

- Females tended to agree most that vet nurses are valued within the veterinary profession, while males tended to agree more that clients value the work of vets.
- Those aged 30 and under agreed most that clients value the work of vets, while those aged 30-49 agreed least.
- Agreement that clients value the work of vet nurses increased as respondent age categories increased.
- Respondents with health conditions had higher mean levels of agreement that vet nurses are valued by the profession and that clients value the work of vet nurses.
- Respondents with caring responsibilities agreed more that clients value the work of vet nurses, while those without caring responsibilities agreed more that clients value the work of vets.
- Those working outside of clinical practice gave a higher mean level of agreement that clients value the work of vet nurses.

- Respondents working part time provided higher mean levels of agreement that both vet nurses are valued within the profession, and that clients value the work of vet nurses.
- Those who were not working as locums or independent service providers selected higher mean levels of agreement that vet nurses are valued by the profession and that clients value the work of vet nurses.
- Respondents who qualified post-2021 gave higher levels of agreement that clients value the work of vets, but lower levels of agreement that clients value the work of vet nurses.
- Individuals planning to retire within the next five years agreed most that vet nurses are valued within the profession and that clients value the work of vet nurses, while those planning to leave the profession for reasons other than retirement agreed least.

## 9.2 General views about veterinary work

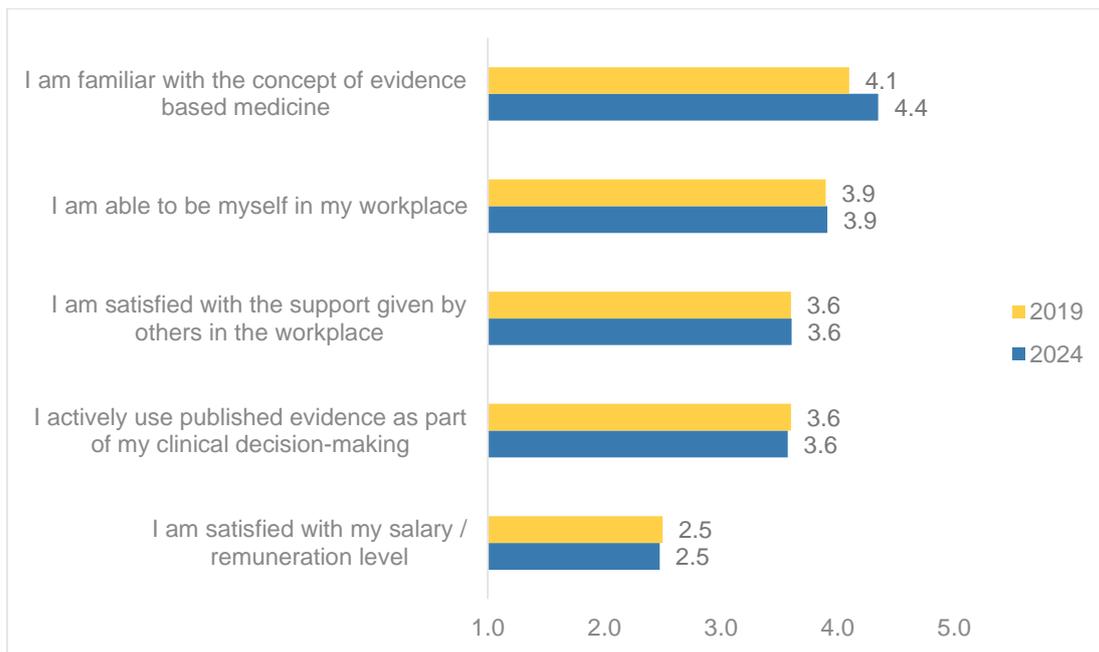
Similar to general views about the veterinary profession, respondents were asked to score their level of agreement with a series of 11 statements aiming to capture views on veterinary work. This was captured using the same five-point scale as the previous statements.

Appendix Table 12.2 shows the full breakdown of results for these 11 statements.

### 9.2.1 Comparison to previous years

Figure 9.6 displays a comparison between 2019 and 2024 data, showing that on all but one statement, mean scores have remained the same as they were in 2019. In 2024, respondents indicated a slightly higher agreement that they were familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine.

**Figure 9.6: General views about veterinary work, 2024 with comparison to 2019 data**



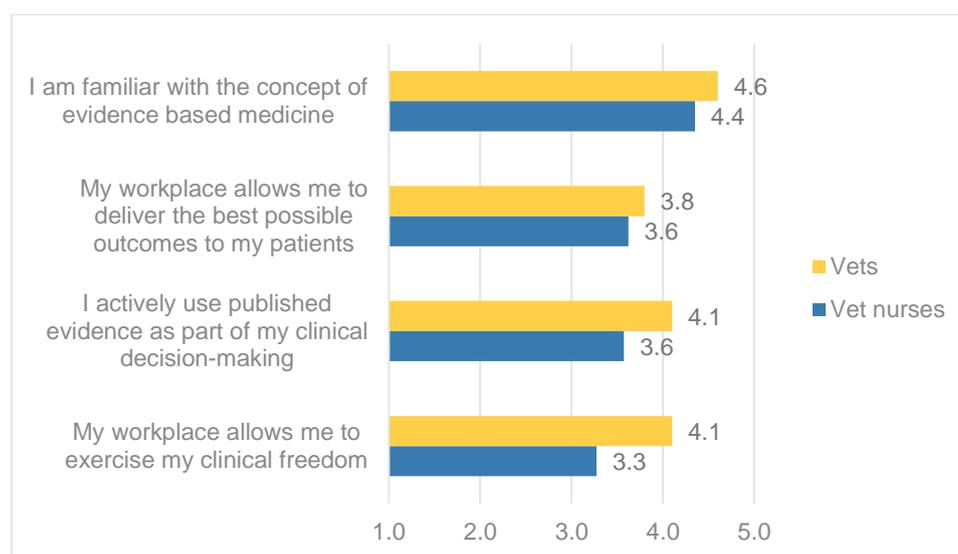
Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024 and 2019

### 9.2.2 Delivering outcomes, using evidence, and clinical freedom

The first series of statements explored views on veterinary work focused on delivering outcomes to clients, using evidence in practice and clinical freedom. Figure 9.7 shows that:

- Vet nurses agreed most that they were familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine, while they agreed the least that their workplaces allow them to exercise clinical freedom.
- Vets gave higher mean scores across all four statements in this category than vet nurses, with the largest gap also observed in the statement regarding clinical freedom.
- Vet nurses and vets had the closest mean level of agreement that their workplaces allow them to deliver the best possible outcomes to their patients.

**Figure 9.7: Views on delivering outcomes, using evidence and clinical freedom, vet nurses compared to vets**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession & RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2024

Analysis highlighted significant differences in statements around outcomes, evidence and clinical freedom when exploring by respondent characteristics.

- Younger respondents were more likely to be familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine.
- Only one statement (familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine) was not statistically significant between respondents with and without health conditions, with those without reporting lower mean scores on the three statements with significance.
- Respondents with caring responsibilities provided a slightly lower mean score than those without caring responsibilities when reporting their familiarity with evidence-based medicine.
- Respondents working within the veterinary profession agreed most that their workplace allows them to both deliver the best outcomes to their clients and to exercise their clinical freedom.
- All four statements received a higher mean score from individuals working outside clinical practice.
- Vet nurses working full time reported higher mean scores for all four statements focusing on outcomes, evidence and clinical freedom.
- Individuals working as independent service providers or locums reported higher mean agreement that their workplace allows them to deliver the best outcomes to their patients, that they use published evidence in their decision-making, and that they are familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine.

- Those who qualified post-2021 indicated higher levels of agreement that their workplace allows them to deliver the best outcomes to their patients, and that they are familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine.
- Respondents planning to stay in the profession gave the highest mean score to each of the four statements, while those planning to leave gave the lowest mean score to each.

### 9.2.3 Improving practice

The next group of statements focused on improving practice within veterinary work. Figure 9.8 shows that:

- Vet nurses gave a higher mean score that they felt comfortable reporting and sharing mistakes than they gave for actively using quality improvement in their practice.
- Vets scored slightly higher, on average, in both statements.

**Figure 9.8: Views on improving practice within the veterinary profession, with vet comparison**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession & RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2024

Detailed analysis exploring responses by respondent characteristics highlighted differences between respondent groups.

- Male respondents indicated a higher level of comfort with reporting and sharing mistakes.
- Individuals with health conditions reported a lower agreement that they feel comfortable reporting and sharing mistakes.

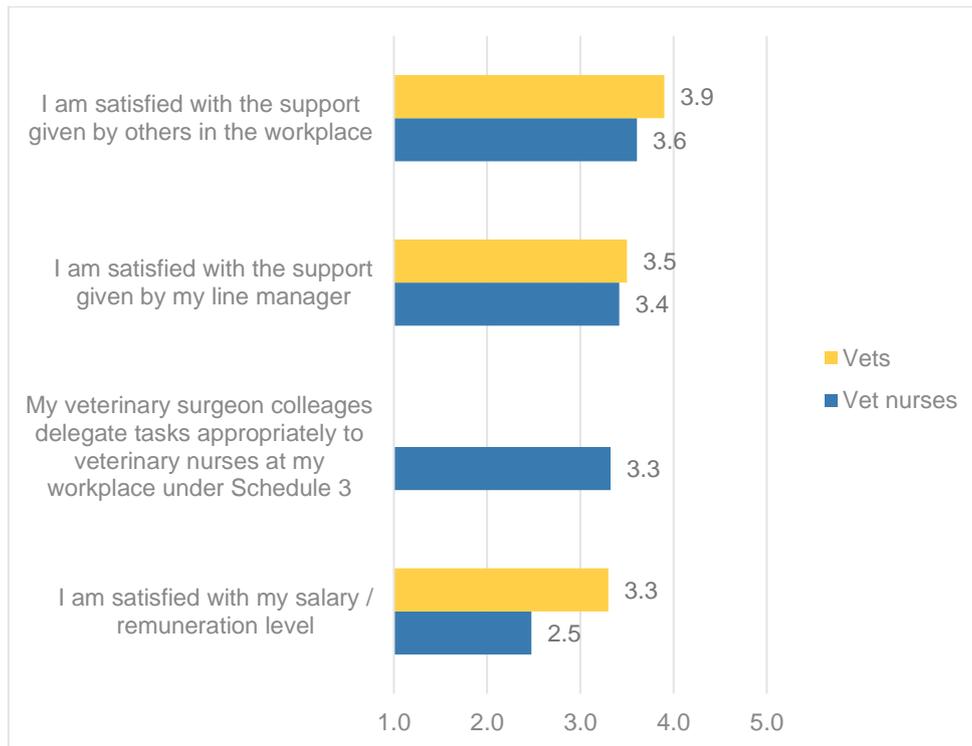
- Both statements focused on improving practice within veterinary work received higher mean levels of agreement from respondents working outside of the profession.
- Respondents working full time provided higher mean scores for both statements on improving practice.
- Respondents planning to leave the profession reported lower mean scores than those planning to stay in the profession or retire, who each provided similar mean scores.

#### **9.2.4 Support, delegation and remuneration**

The final grouping of statements collected views on support, delegation and remuneration within veterinary work. Figure 9.9 displays results that show:

- Vet nurses, more than vets, generally disagreed that they are happy with their salary or remuneration level, with only 28% of vet nurses agreeing or strongly agreeing.
- Vet nurses remained neutral on other statements, with their highest mean agreement being around support provided by people other than their line manager (64% agreeing or strongly agreeing).
- As with other statement groupings, vets tended to score higher across other statements.
- In a statement only presented to vet nurses, responses remained neutral when exploring delegation from vets to vet nurses in line with Schedule 3.

**Figure 9.9: Views on support, delegation and remuneration, with vet comparison**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession & RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2024

Analysis exploring responses by sub-groups identified significant differences within respondent characteristics.

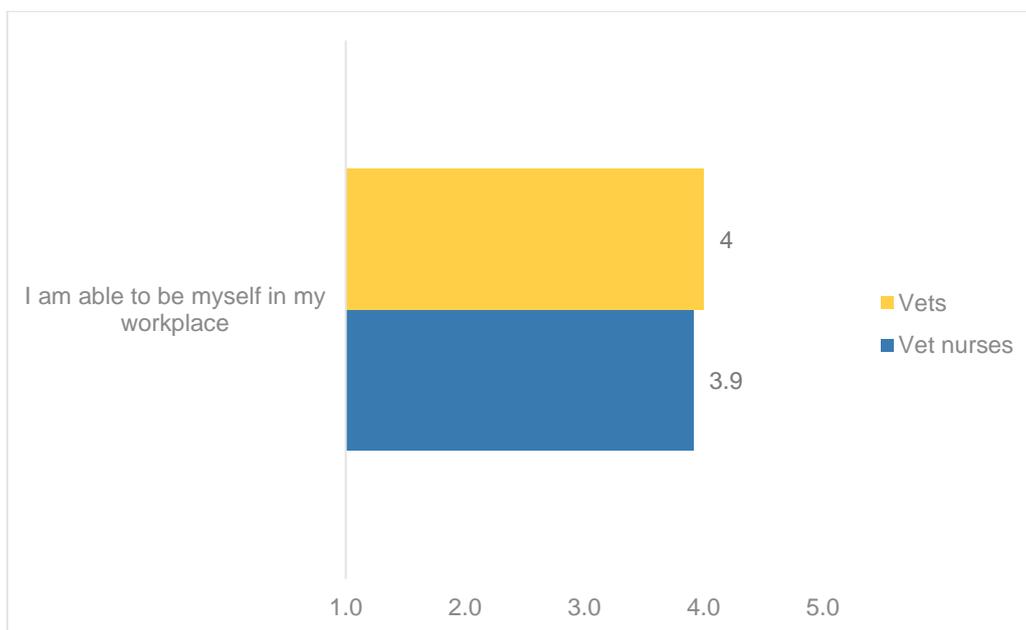
- Satisfaction with salary/remuneration increased with age.
- The youngest (under 30) and eldest (60 and over) respondents agreed most that vets delegate appropriately under Schedule 3, while those aged 40-49 agreed least.
- Respondents with health conditions reported lower mean scores across all four statements around support, delegation and remuneration.
- Respondents with caring responsibilities indicated they had higher levels of satisfaction with their salary/remuneration.
- Those working within the profession gave higher mean scores across all four statements focussing on support, delegation and remuneration.
- Respondents working within clinical practice had the lowest levels of satisfaction with their salary/remuneration and the support they receive from both, their line manager and others within the profession.
- Independent service providers/locums had the highest levels of satisfaction with their salary/remuneration and the support they receive from others in the profession and agreed most that vets delegate appropriately under Schedule 3.

- Respondents who qualified pre-2021 reported higher mean satisfaction with their salary/remuneration.
- Conversely, respondents who qualified post-2021 reported higher levels of satisfaction with the support they received from both their line manager and others in the profession, and agreed most that vets delegate appropriately under Schedule 3.
- Those planning to retire had the highest levels of satisfaction with their salary/remuneration, while those planning to leave the profession had the lowest levels of satisfaction.
- Respondents planning to remain in the profession agreed most that vets delegate appropriately under Schedule 3 and had the highest levels of satisfaction with line manager support, while those planning to leave the profession scored lowest for both of these statements.
- Both those planning to remain in the profession and those planning to retire had the highest levels of satisfaction with support from others within the profession.

### 9.2.5 Able to be myself

Both vet nurses and vets tended to agree with the statement on ability to be oneself in the workplace, providing a mean score of around 4 (Figure 9.10).

**Figure 9.10: Views on the ability to be oneself in the workplace, with vet comparison**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession & RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2024

Further analysis explored this statement by participant characteristics, highlighting differences between groups.

- Respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds agreed least that they felt able to be themselves in their workplace.
- Individuals with health conditions felt less able to be themselves in their workplace.
- Those working within the profession reported higher levels of agreement that they felt able to be themselves in their workplace.
- Respondents working in clinical practice reported lower levels of agreement that they were able to be themselves in their workplace.
- Roles other than independent service providers and locums provided higher mean scores than independent service providers and locums.
- Respondents who qualified pre-2021 agreed most that they could be themselves in the workplace.
- Respondents planning to leave the profession felt they were least able to be themselves in the workplace, while those planning to stay in the profession reported the highest mean scores.

### 9.3 Reflections on career choice

Vet nurses responding to the survey were asked if, given the opportunity, they would still choose to work within the profession. Responses, displayed in Table 9.1, show that:

- Falls in the proportion of respondents saying they would remain in the profession seen between 2014 and 2019 data continued into 2024, with only around two-fifths (42%) saying they would opt-in to the profession again.
- Coinciding with this is the upward trend in the proportion of respondents saying they would choose not to work in the profession if starting their career again, rising to 29% from 22% in 2019 and 15% in 2014.

**Table 9.1: Reflections on career choice, with comparison to 2019 and 2014 data**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %	2014 %
Yes	1,234	42.3	50.8	60.2
No	835	28.7	21.6	15.1
Unsure	845	29.0	27.7	24.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,914</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014*

Further analysis identified significant differences by respondent groups. Table 9.2 shows that:

- Female respondents were more likely to say they would opt to become a vet nurse again if restarting their career, while males were more likely to respond No or Unsure.
- Respondents aged 30-39 were least likely to say they would opt to become a vet nurse again, while those aged 60 and over were most likely.

- With the exception of those under 30, the proportion of respondents saying they would not restart their career as a vet nurse decreases as age categories increase.
- Respondents with health conditions were less likely to indicate they would opt to become vet nurses again if restarting their career.
- Those who qualified pre-2021 were less likely to say they would move into the veterinary nursing profession again.
- Respondents planning to stay in the profession for more than five years were most likely to say they would go into the profession again if starting their career over, while those planning to leave the profession were most likely to say that they would not move into the profession given the opportunity to restart their career.
- Respondents planning to retire were most likely to be unsure about whether they would start working in the profession given the opportunity to restart their career, however, with similar proportions saying they would (18%) and would not (23%).

**Table 9.2: Career reflections by respondent characteristics**

		%		
		Yes	No	Unsure
Gender	Female	43.6	28.1	28.2
	Male	25.3	37.9	36.8
Age	Under 30	45.2	26.7	28.0
	30-39	38.9	31.3	29.7
	40-49	42.8	27.4	29.8
	50-59	46.9	22.9	30.2
	60 and over	57.8	12.5	29.7
Health conditions	Yes	39.5	32.0	28.4
	No	44.4	26.9	28.7
Qualification year	Pre-2021	38.7	21.6	30.4
	Post-2021	54.0	30.8	24.4
Career plans	Stay in the profession for more than five years	53.5	45.9	11.8
	Fully retire	17.5	22.6	59.9
	Leave the profession	29.0	31.6	28.3

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 9.4 Best things, challenges and improvements

### 9.4.1 Best things about being a vet nurse

Respondents were asked to select up to five of the best things about being a vet nurse from a list of options. Table 9.3 shows that:

- Working with animals remains the best thing about working in the profession, with almost all (94%) of respondents selecting this option.
- This was followed by making a difference (65%) and job satisfaction (49%), which were also the top two and three responses in 2019.
- Below half of respondents (49%) selected job satisfaction in 2024, compared with 52% in 2019.
- Financial reward (0.6%), working hours (1.8%) and autonomy (3.6%) were the three response options selected by the fewest respondents, each also fell on 2019 data.
- Workplace relationships/colleagues (46%) and challenge/stimulus (39%) both increased on 2019 data, from 34.9% and 39.1%, respectively.

A further 2% of respondents selected 'other' as a response. Other responses included access to further learning, job security and teaching future vet nurses.

**Table 9.3: Best things about being a vet nurse**

	N	2024 %	2019 %
Working with animals	2,711	93.8	91.4
Making a difference	1,877	64.9	54.9
Job satisfaction	1,415	49.0	52.2
Workplace relationships/colleagues	1,331	46.1	34.9
Challenge/stimulus	1,270	43.9	39.1
Opportunities for learning	974	33.7	-
Client relationships	602	20.8	22.6
Ability to choose working location	276	9.6	8.0
Diversity of career opportunities	174	6.0	-
Status	112	3.9	3.2
Work-life balance	111	3.8	4.9
Autonomy	104	3.6	3.7
Working hours	53	1.8	2.3
Financial reward	17	0.6	0.8
Other	30	1.0	-

*'-' Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024 and 2019*

Further analysis was able to identify significant differences in responses to some statements by respondent characteristics.

- Those planning to leave the profession were least likely to select several statements, these included: challenge/stimulus, diversity of career opportunities, job satisfaction, making a difference, opportunities for learning, work-life balance and workplace relationships/colleagues.

- Respondents planning to fully retire were most likely to cite client relationships as one of the best things about being a vet nurse.
- By role, Nurses and Senior Nurses were most likely to indicate that their ability to choose their working location was one of the best things about being a vet nurse, while no independent service providers gave this response.
- Practice owners and independent service providers were more likely to select job satisfaction and making a difference as some of the best things about being a vet nurse, while locums and practice managers were the least likely.
- Nurses were considerably more likely to indicate that opportunities for learning and working with animals were some of the best parts about being a vet nurse than any other respondent role type.
- Locums were considerably less likely to indicate that workplace relationships were one of the best parts about being a vet nurse.
- Respondents working outside of the profession were more likely to select the diversity of career opportunities as one of the best things about being a vet nurse.

#### **9.4.2 Challenges facing the profession**

Similar to the best things about being a vet nurse, respondents were asked to select the five main challenges facing the veterinary nursing profession.

Table 9.4 illustrates that:

- Poor financial reward (66%) and stress levels (47%) remained in the top three main challenges facing the veterinary nursing profession, alongside, the newly introduced for the 2024 survey option of, staff shortages, which 51% of respondents selected.
- Technology (>1%), discrimination (>1%) and lack of diversity within the profession, all new options presented in the 2024 survey, were the three least commonly selected challenges.
- Responses generally remained similar to 2019 data, however, a handful of challenges increased more notably, including:
  - Affordability of veterinary services (2019, 27%; 2024, 38%);
  - Lack of respect/recognition from the public (2019, 31%; 2024, 38%); and,
  - Lack of career progression (2019, 21%; 2024, 27%).

A further 2% of respondents selected 'other' as a response. Other responses included corporates taking over smaller veterinary practices, a lack of flexibility within the profession and the lack of protection for the vet nurse title. A handful of respondents also said that all of the above should be considered important challenges facing the profession.

**Table 9.4: Challenges facing the profession**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019%
Poor financial reward	1,892	65.8	63.4
Staff shortages	1,459	50.8	-
Stress levels	1,355	47.1	46.6
Lack of respect/recognition from the public	1,103	38.4	30.7
Affordability of veterinary services	1,027	35.7	27.1
Underutilisation of skills	995	34.6	-
Client expectations/demands	976	34.0	34.8
Lack of career progression	765	26.6	20.9
Staff turnover	707	24.6	-
Poor support for the profession	533	18.5	-
Lack of respect/recognition from employers	516	18.0	18.0
Economic climate	453	15.8	11.1
Changing structures in veterinary practice ownership	406	14.1	14.5
Animal welfare issues	396	13.8	-
Misinformation/bad PR	372	12.9	10.6
Lack of respect/recognition from vets	350	12.2	12.5
Expectations of employees	149	5.2	-
Brexit	113	3.9	2.8
Changes in training	86	3.0	-
Lack of diversity within the profession	68	2.4	-
Discrimination	24	0.8	-
Technology	19	0.7	-
Other	59	2.1	1.2

<sup>‘-’</sup> Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024 and 2019

Detailed analysis identified significant responses by respondent characteristics.

- Those planning to stay in the profession were most likely to select the economic climate and misinformation/bad PR as challenges, while those planning to leave the profession were the least likely.
- Respondents planning to leave the profession were notably more likely to select a lack of career progression to be one of the biggest challenges in the profession.
- Individuals planning to stay in the profession for more than five years were the least likely to cite diversity within the profession as a challenge.
- Those planning to stay in the profession were the most likely to indicate that a lack of respect/recognition from the public is a challenge facing the profession, while those planning to retire were the least likely.

- Individuals planning to leave the profession were most likely to select a lack of respect/recognition from employers, while those planning to stay in the profession were the least likely.
- Poor financial reward was selected by at least three-fifths of each group, however, respondents planning to leave the profession were slightly more likely to choose this as a main challenge.
- Respondents planning to leave the profession were most likely to select poor support for the profession.
- Respondents working outside of the profession were more likely to cite lack of career progression as one of the biggest challenges facing the veterinary nursing profession than those working inside the profession.
- Staff turnover was more commonly selected by individuals working outside the profession.
- Practice owners were considerably less likely to select poor financial reward as a main challenge than all other role types.

### **9.4.3 Improvements to the profession**

Finally, respondents were asked to select up to five improvements that could be made to the profession.

Table 9.5 shows that:

- Similar to 2019, better financial reward (78%), more respect/recognition from the public (54%) and better opportunities for career progression (43%) remained the three top improvements selected by respondents.
- More variety (4%), greater variety of business model opportunities (5%) and a more open culture (6%) were the three least commonly selected improvements to be made to the profession, with the latter two being new additions to the 2024 survey.
- The proportion of respondents selecting better financial reward fell by eight percentage points on 2019 data.
- Some statements had notable differences in the proportion of respondents selecting responses, including more respect/recognition from the public (2019, 54%; 2024, 41%) and better opportunities for career progression (2019, 32%; 2024, 43%).

A further 3% of respondents selected 'other' as a response. Other responses included having more responsibility, protecting the vet nurse title and increasing pay.

**Table 9.5: Improvements that could be made to the veterinary nursing profession, with comparison to 2019 data**

	2024 N	2024 %	2019 %
Better financial reward	2,249	77.9	86.3
More respect/recognition from the public	1,558	54.0	40.9
Better work-life balance	1,268	43.9	41.6
Better opportunities for career progression	1,254	43.4	32.3
More respect/recognition from vets	878	30.4	-
Better management/leadership	861	29.8	-
More flexible working	755	26.2	15.5
Less workload pressure	740	25.6	18.7
Managing client expectations	666	23.1	-
More responsibility	518	17.9	18.9
More support staff	454	15.7	12.6
Less regulation/bureaucracy	403	14.0	5.6
More professional support	327	11.3	-
Shorter hours	326	11.3	5.4
Improved CPD processes	297	10.3	-
More personal support	200	6.9	-
A more open culture	184	6.4	-
Less out-of-hours/on-call	191	6.6	7.5
Greater variety of business model opportunities	145	5.0	-
More variety	107	3.7	2.4
Other	73	2.5	1.7

‘-’ Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024 and 2019

Additional analysis explored responses by respondent characteristics, identifying some significant differences between group responses.

- Those with the job role ‘nurse’ were considerably more likely to select better financial reward as an improvement that could make the profession better than other veterinary nursing roles (head/deputy head/senior nurse, clinical coach, locum, practice manager/owner).
- Those with the job role ‘nurse’ and clinical coaches were most likely to select better management/leadership as an improvement.
- Practice owners were most likely to select less regulation/bureaucracy and managing client expectations as ways to improve the profession.
- Practice managers and owners were notably less likely to select more flexible working as an improvement to better the profession.

- Better management/leadership was most commonly selected by those planning to leave the profession, and least likely to be selected by those planning to stay in the profession.
- Less regulation/bureaucracy was most commonly selected by respondents planning to retire, while selected by similar proportions of those planning to leave and stay in the profession.
- Those planning to leave the profession were less likely to select managing client expectations as a way to improve the profession.
- More flexible working was most commonly selected by those planning to leave the profession.
- Respondents planning to stay in the profession were most likely to indicate that more respect/recognition from the public would improve the veterinary nursing profession.
- Shorter hours were least commonly selected by those planning to stay in the profession, while equally selected by those planning to retire or leave the profession.
- Those working outside of the profession were more likely to select less out-of-hours/on-call working and a better work-life balance as improvements to the profession.
- Individuals working within the profession were most likely to indicate that managing client expectations would improve the profession but were most likely to say that more respect/recognition from the public would improve the profession.
- Respondents working within the profession were more likely to suggest that more support staff would improve the profession.

## 10 Wellbeing

This chapter reports the results of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), which asks about respondents' feelings about their life in general, not just at work.

### Chapter summary

- The average WEMWBS score across all vet nurse participants was 44.1, suggesting the mental wellbeing of the vet nurse workforce was, on average, poorer than that observed in the wider population. Concerningly, this has decreased in comparison with 2019 (46.2) and 2014 (47.5).
- The average WEMWBS score across all age groups, apart from those over 60, has significantly decreased. The under 30s had the lowest score across the age groups, at 43.9, while the over 60s had the highest score, at 48.7.
- Respondents who indicated that they had a disability or health condition reported a significantly lower mean score than those who did not (40.1 compared to 46), in line with previous years. Male respondents with health conditions had lower mean scores than female respondents with health conditions (37 and 40.3 respectively).
- Respondents with caring responsibilities returned a significantly higher WEMWBS score compared to those without (45 and 43.7 respectively).
- Individuals working within clinical practice had a lower mean score than those working outside clinical practice (43.8 and 47.8 respectively).
- By position in practice, nurses (43.1) and senior nurses (44.1) had the lowest mean WEMWBS scores, whilst practice owners (48.9) and independent vet nursing service providers (48.9) had the highest mean scores.
- Respondents working full time had a lower mean score than those working part time (43.8 and 45.1 respectively).

### 10.1 Background to the WEMWBS

The WEMWBS asks respondents to rate 14 attitudinal statements that describe their thoughts and feelings during the last two weeks. Individual items are scored from one (none of the time) to five (all of the time) and a total scale score is calculated by summing the 14 item scores. The minimum score is 14, while the maximum score is 70. The average score nationally is 51, indicating relatively positive mental wellbeing within the general population.

The WEMWBS has been benchmarked, and therefore individual scores of 40 and lower can be considered indicative of probable clinical depression, while individual scores of between 41 and 44 can be considered indicative of possible or mild depression.

## 10.2 Response to WEMWBS

The average WEMWBS score across all vet nurse participants was 44, suggesting the mental wellbeing of the vet nurse workforce is poorer than that observed in the wider population.

Table 10.1 indicates that the trend observed in previous years of the overall WEMWBS score decreasing continued in 2024.

**Table 10.1: Mean WEMWBS score of vet nurse participants in 2024, compared with 2019 and 2014**

	2024 N	2024 mean	2019 mean	2014 mean	2010 mean
Mean score	2,624	44.1	46.2	47.5	47.4

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

Further analysis highlighted differences by demographics (see Table 10.2):

- Mean WEMWBS scores were significantly lower for younger participants, similar to data in 2019, with under 30-year-olds presenting a mean score of 44, whilst those over 60 presented a mean score of 49.
- The mean WEMWBS score across all age groups, apart from those over 60, significantly decreased.
- Respondents who indicated that they had a disability or health condition reported a significantly lower mean score than those who did not (40.1 compared to 46), following observations in previous years.
- Respondents with caring responsibilities presented a significant difference of a slightly higher WEMWBS score of 45, compared to those without caring responsibilities who scored 43.7.

**Table 10.2 Mean WEMWBS score by demographic variables**

		2024	2019	2014
Age	Under 30	43.9	46.0	-
	30-39	43.6	46.2	47.0
	40-49	44.6	46.8	47.0
	50-59	45.4	46.0	-
	60 and over	48.7	46.6	-
Health conditions	Has a health condition	40.1	41.0	44.2
	Does not have a health condition	46.0	46.7	47.7
Caring responsibilities	Has caring responsibilities	45.0	-	-
	Does not have caring responsibilities	43.7	-	-

‘-’ Denotes that this option was not presented in previous years.

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024, 2019 and 2014

Table 10.3 presents further analysis by demographic variables and shows that:

- Males aged 40-49 returned the lowest mean WEMWBS score amongst all gender age breakdowns, followed by males aged 30 and under.
- Females from minority ethnic groups returned the highest mean WEMWBS score, but conversely males from minority ethnic groups had the lowest mean scores.
- Respondents from white ethnic backgrounds aged 50-59 had higher mean scores than those in other age categories; this is similar for respondents from minority ethnic groups.
- Male respondents with health conditions returned lower mean scores than female respondents with health conditions.

**Table 10.3: Breakdown of WEMWBS scores by intersectional demographics**

		Male	Female	Under 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and over
Age	Under 30	42.2	44.0					
	30-39	44.6	43.6					
	40-49	37.5	44.8					
	50-59	45.5	45.4					
	60 and over	-	48.9					
Ethnicity	White	43.2	44.2	44.0	43.6	45.3	48.9	44.3
	Minority ethnic group	31.0	45.3	43.3	42.0	48.5	51.5	-
Health condition	Yes	37.0	40.3	40.6	39.2	40.0	42.8	38.8
	No	45.2	46.1	45.8	45.7	46.6	46.8	50.1

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Similar analysis found significant differences across all work-related categories (see Table 10.4); these were:

- Respondents working within the profession had a lower mean WEMWBS score than those working outside the profession.
- Individuals working within clinical practice had a lower mean score than those working outside clinical practice.
- By role, Nurses and Senior Nurses had the lowest mean WEMWBS scores, whilst Practice Owners and independent veterinary nursing service providers had the highest mean scores.

- Respondents working full time had a lower mean score than those working part time.
- Those who qualified from 2021 onwards had a lower mean score than those who qualified pre-2021.

**Table 10.4: Mean WEMWBS score by type of work**

		<b>2024</b>
Profession	Within the veterinary nursing profession	44.1
	Outside the veterinary nursing profession	47.5
Clinical practice	Within clinical practice	43.8
	Not in clinical practice	47.8
Position in practice	Nurse	43.1
	Senior Nurse	44.1
	Clinical Coach	44.9
	Practice Manager or Administrator	44.5
	Practice Owner	48.9
	Independent Vet Nursing Service Provider	48.8
Full/part time	Full time	43.8
	Part time	45.1
Qualification year	2021 onwards	43.3
	Post-2021	44.4

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

# 11 Views about the RCVS

This chapter summarises respondents' views about the RCVS, notably its values, communication, purpose and various initiatives.

## Chapter summary

- Vet nurses agreed clearly that they respected the RCVS, and that the organisation has a good international reputation; however, they were slightly negative that the RCVS registration provided good value for money and that the organisation was in touch with the issues facing those working in the profession.
- Vet nurses generally felt that the RCVS was 'mostly' meeting its aspirations around behaviours, and over two-thirds felt the aspiration to be diverse and inclusive was being met. Compassion, however, was the aspiration that respondents felt was met the least.
- Of the 13% who had contacted the RCVS in the year prior to the survey, three-quarters rated professionalism as the highest of all qualities displayed; compassion attracted the lowest agreement. Half felt that the clarity of communication was either good or excellent.
- Half were aware of the RCVS Academy, with two-fifths accessing it. When asked about RCVS initiatives, most were aware of Mind Matters, with ViVet being the initiative that respondents were least aware of. However, engagement with the different RCVS initiatives was low, at around 10%. In general, awareness and engagement have improved since 2019.
- When asked about the RCVS's purpose, there was clear agreement that the RCVS upholds standards within the veterinary nursing profession and is a positive force for animal health and welfare. However, views were slightly negative that the RCVS supported vet nurses in their work and supported vet nurse health and wellbeing.
- On a scale of one to ten, vet nurses gave the RCVS an overall score of 6, which is lower than 7.15 in 2019.
- Vet nurses would like the RCVS to do more to improve the status and recognition of vet nurses, to understand what it is like to work in the profession day-to-day, and to advocate for better pay and progression. They would also like the RCVS to reduce what they perceive to be unclear and impractical regulations; instead, they requested more detailed, practical, less bureaucratic advice. In addition, they would like the RCVS to pay equal attention to vets and vet nurses.
- In their final thoughts, vet nurses shared comments on a variety of themes: flexible working, inadequate reasonable adjustments, health and wellbeing, reducing vets' burden by loosening restrictions to allow vet nurses to take on more tasks and, in line with previous surveys, further monitoring of corporate involvement in the profession by the RCVS. Throughout, the passion for the veterinary nursing profession and hope for the future is apparent in open-text responses.

## 11.1 Perceptions

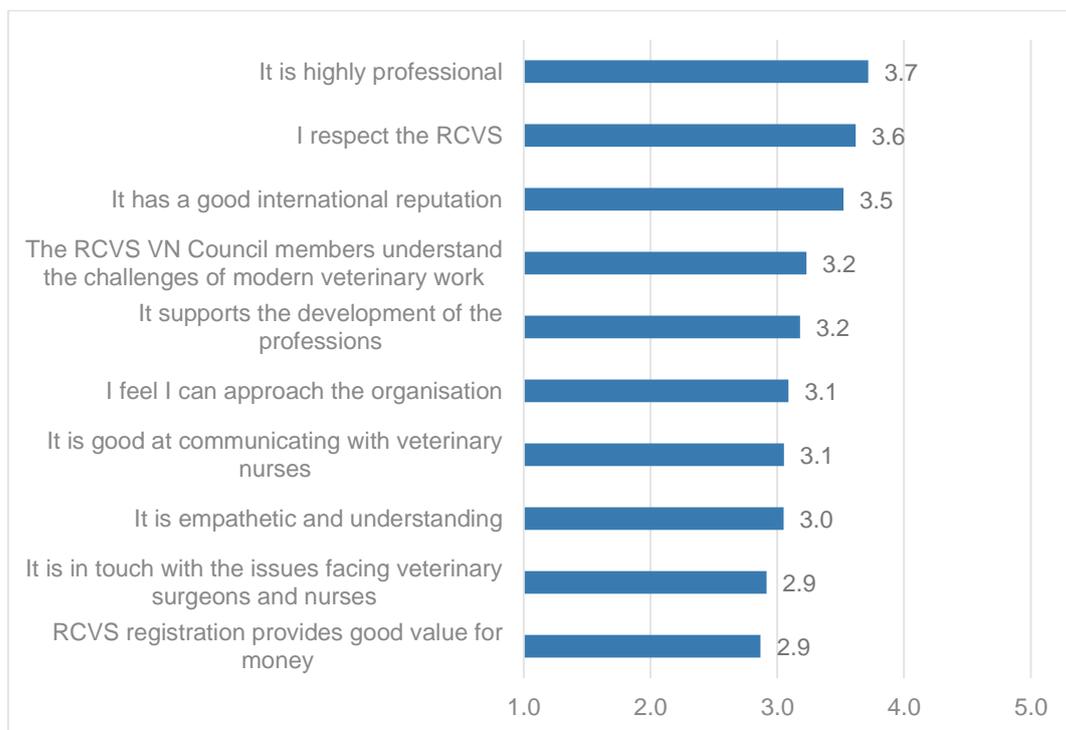
Respondents were presented with a series of nine statements aiming to collect their views about the RCVS.

Appendix Table 12.3 shows a full breakdown of results, including the number of responses, the spread of responses across the scale, and mean responses.

Figure 11.1 displays the mean score for the nine statements, and shows that:

- Responses to statements tended to be neutral overall, with just two leaning slightly more toward a positive level of agreement.
- Vet nurses agreed least that RCVS registration provides good value for money and the organisation is in touch with the issues facing vet nurses and vets.
- Conversely, vet nurses agreed most that they respect the RCVS and that the organisation has a good international reputation.

**Figure 11.1: Perceptions of the RCVS**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 11.2 Values

Survey respondents were presented with four behaviour aspirations of the RCVS (diverse and inclusive, forward looking, compassionate, straight-talking) and asked to state how well they feel the organisation meets these aspirations. Table 11.1 shows that:

- Vet nurses generally tended to feel that the RCVS is ‘mostly’ meeting their behaviour aspirations.
- The aspiration that respondents were most likely to agree with was to be diverse and inclusive, with 70% saying this was either mostly or totally met.

- Compassion was the aspiration that respondents felt was met the least, with over two-fifths (43%) of respondents saying this was either only partially met or not met at all.

**Table 11.1: How well the RCVS meets its behaviour aspirations**

	%			
	Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Totally
Diverse and inclusive	5.4	24.6	48.6	21.4
Straight-talking	12.9	26.8	41.6	18.6
Forward-looking	9.1	30.6	46.1	14.2
Compassionate	9.2	33.5	43.0	13.4

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 11.3 Contact and communications

Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they had cause to contact the RCVS in the 12 months before the survey. To this, 13% said they did make contact.

First, focusing on experiences of communicating with RCVS staff, Table 11.2 shows that three-quarters (75%) of respondents who had made contact said the professionalism of RCVS staff was either good or excellent, the highest-rated of all the qualities. This was followed closely by tone when addressing you, which 71% assessed as good or excellent. Compassion had the lowest mean score, although over half (55%) thought the compassion of RCVS colleagues was either good or excellent.

**Table 11.2: Views on communication with RCVS staff**

	%					Mean
	Very poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	
Professionalism	3.3	1.8	19.9	41.4	33.5	4.0
Tone when addressing you	3.5	5.7	20.2	36.9	33.8	3.9
Helpfulness	5.5	10.6	21.8	31.8	30.3	3.7
Approachability	4.8	9.2	22.2	35.9	27.9	3.7
Ability to solve your issue/answer your question	8.0	14.5	19.4	28.3	29.8	3.6
Compassion	6.0	13.9	24.7	32.3	23.1	3.5

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Following this, respondents who had made contact with the RCVS were asked to rate their general experiences of communication. Table 11.3 illustrates that all the aspects were rated positively. Around half (49%) said the clarity of communication was either good or excellent; the other aspects achieved between 40% and 45% good and excellent responses.

**Table 11.3: General views on communication with the RCVS**

	%					Mean
	Very poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	
Clarity of communication	2.9	13.1	34.7	38.8	10.5	3.4
Transparency of communication	4.0	13.3	37.1	35.7	9.8	3.3
Speed of response	5.9	11.9	38.6	33.9	9.8	3.3
Understanding your point of view	5.7	15.5	35.4	33.7	9.8	3.3
Implementing agreed decisions in a timely manner	5.5	12.3	37.8	33.9	10.6	3.3

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 11.4 RCVS Academy

Around 50% of the sample were aware of the RCVS Academy and, of this 50%, two-fifths (41%) had accessed the Academy (see Table 11.4).

**Table 11.4: Awareness and access of the RCVS Academy**

	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Are you aware of the RCVS Academy	1,391	49.5	1,471	50.5
Have you accessed the RCVS Academy	566	41.1	811	58.9

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Data presented in Table 11.5 show that almost half (46%) of the sample had not accessed a course, whilst over one-third (36%) had accessed one course and a further 18% had accessed more than one course.

**Table 11.5: Completion of an RCVS Academy course**

	N	%
Yes, one	201	35.6
Yes, more than one	103	18.2
No	261	46.2

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

## 11.5 Awareness of initiatives

Responses displayed in Table 11.6 illustrate that:

- Respondents were most aware of the Mind Matters initiative (74%), followed by VN Futures (60%) and Vet Futures (53%).

- Respondents were least aware of ViVet, with only 25% aware of the initiative.
- Engagement overall was low, with Mind Matters and VN Futures having the most engagement from the sample, at 10% and 9% of respondents, respectively.

**Table 11.6: Awareness of RCVS initiatives**

	Aware		Used/Engaged with		Not aware of	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mind Matters	1,939	74.0	269	10.3	414	15.8
VN Futures	1,562	59.7	246	9.4	810	30.9
Vet Futures	1,347	52.6	32	1.2	1,183	46.2
RCVS Leadership	1,110	43.4	60	2.3	1,387	54.2
Diversity and Inclusion	890	34.8	36	1.4	1,631	63.8
ViVet	636	25.4	19	0.8	1,853	73.9

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

It is worth noting that both awareness and engagement with these initiatives has improved since 2019.

## 11.6 Purpose

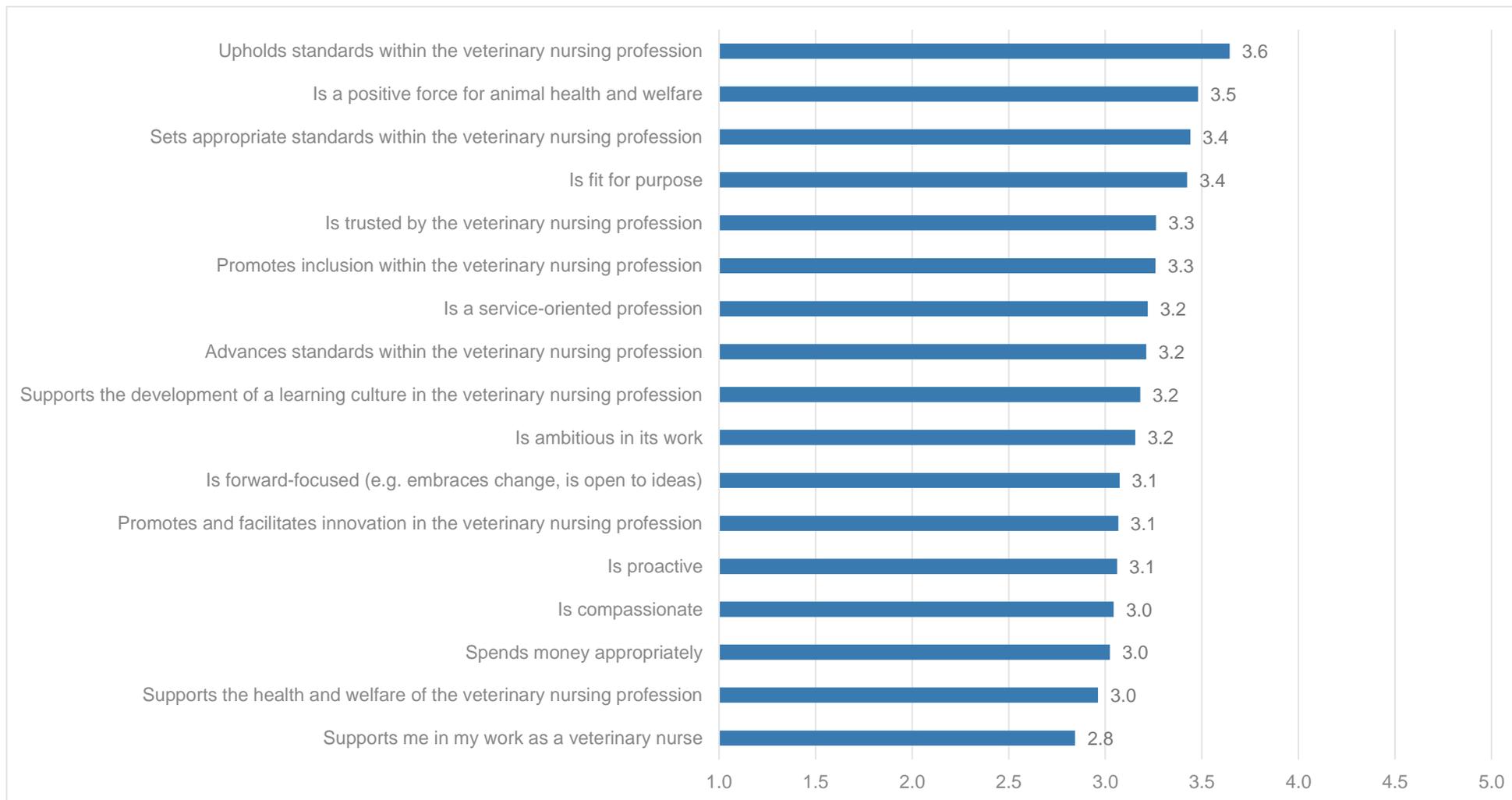
To understand vet nurses' views on the RCVS' purpose and mission, respondents were presented with 17 statements and asked to score the extent to which they felt the RCVS delivers on each. Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Appendix Table 12.4 outlines the full response to this series of statements, including the number of responses, the spread across scores, and the means.

Figure 11.2 also displays the mean score provided by all respondents to this series of statements, and shows:

- Statements generally averaged around the mid-point, with only two (a positive force for animal health and welfare and upholds standards within the veterinary nursing profession) leaning slightly toward more positive responses.
- Support for vet nurses received the lowest mean score, followed by support for vet nurse health and welfare, spending money appropriately and compassion.

**Figure 11.2: Views on the purpose of the RCVS (mean scores)**



Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

Further analysis highlighted statistically significant differences in responses to four of the 17 statements depending on whether an individual had been in touch with the RCVS in the 12 months before completing the survey. Those in touch with the RCVS provided lower mean responses to the following four statements:

- The RCVS is trusted by the veterinary nursing profession.
- The RCVS is forward-focused.
- The RCVS is a positive force for animal health and welfare.
- The RCVS promotes and facilitates innovation in the veterinary nursing profession.

Further analysis exploring responses to two statements, '*promotes inclusion within the veterinary nursing profession*' and '*promotes the health and welfare of vet nurses*', by protected characteristics highlighted significant differences in how respondents scored some statements depending on their personal characteristics.

- On average, male respondents gave lower scores than female respondents to both statements.
- Ethnic minority groups agreed less that the RCVS promoted inclusion in the profession.
- Respondents with caring responsibilities scored lower on both statements compared to those without caring responsibilities.
- Those with health conditions gave a lower mean score when considering the health and welfare support provided by the RCVS.
- Respondents aged under 30 provide the highest mean score to both statements.

## 11.7 Overall views

To gather an overall understanding on the perceptions of the RCVS, respondents were asked to rate the organisation using a scale ranging from 1 to 10, where 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent; a midpoint score would be 5.5. The mean score across respondents was 6.28, suggesting a somewhat positive view of the RCVS; however, this is lower than the mean score of 7.15 in 2019. Further analysis identified one significant finding: respondents who graduated post-2021 gave a higher mean score (7.0) when compared to respondents who graduated pre-2021 (6.1).

## 11.8 Do more, do less?

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were provided an open space to share things they would like the RCVS to do more and less of in the future. Given the number of open-text responses, a random sample of around 20% of responses (N=1,012) was selected for review to inform suggestions.

### 11.8.1 Do more

Respondents indicated a range of things they would like the RCVS to do more to improve the veterinary nursing profession. The most common theme amongst the sample of responses selected was to improve the status of and increase recognition for, vet nurses working in the profession. This is a common theme throughout this report.

Complementing this was a call for protection of the veterinary nurse title and to increase the responsibilities of vet nurses.

*Actively promote and regularly review the role of vet nurses and enable us to work as the highly qualified professionals we are.*

Respondents also called for the RCVS to spend more time understanding the day-to-day experiences of the workforce both in the veterinary profession generally, and the veterinary nursing profession more specifically. Several respondents felt this would be beneficial to inform future policies and understand how these will impact the day-to-day working of those in the profession. Some respondents indicated that they felt that the RCVS has become more detached from those working in practice since the Covid pandemic.

*Actually be in touch with the veterinary community. It feels as if since Covid they've become detached from what is key in the profession, or I'm unaware of it so they need to vocalise more about what they're doing.*

Some responses suggested improvements that could be made to the way the RCVS operates and the legislation that the RCVS promotes to improve ways of working within the profession. Responses categorised within this theme called for the RCVS to become less bureaucratic, listening more to RCVS members than relying on the views of the VN Council. There were also calls to reduce membership fees, implement more realistic funding for membership costs and provide more timely responses to complaints escalated to the RCVS.

*Listen to the views of the majority of the profession, rather than rely heavily on the VN Council.*

Pay, progression and development, and retention were common themes within responses. On pay, respondents suggested the RCVS could advocate for better pay within the veterinary nursing profession by appropriately evaluating the current pay of vet nurses, encouraging employers to pay fairly and publishing guidelines on pay.

Regarding progression and development, respondents said they would like more development opportunities. Suggestions included amendments to Schedule 3 to allow vet nurses to do more, developing a more rigorous training programme, supporting vet nurses wishing to qualify as vets, and providing more accredited training.

Overall, respondents indicated better pay and progression and development opportunities would support better retention within the profession.

*Provide RCVS-accredited specialist courses with associated additional qualifications for registered vet nurses, and/or accredit courses that already exist to bring official and centralised recognition to advanced veterinary nursing qualifications.*

Better communication, particularly around new legislation and regulation and the anticipated benefits these will have on the profession, was another common suggestion. Several suggested this should be done at a grassroots level, rather than through a top-down approach to communicating, to ensure messages were received by those working in frontline roles. These comments frequently stemmed from respondents' unawareness of the RCVS's role as a regulatory body, suggesting it should instead advocate for better working conditions for vet nurses.

The final suggestions for what the RCVS could do more of were around building a better understanding and awareness within the general public about veterinary care and the vet nurse role. In light of the rising cost of living, several respondents flagged that veterinary care costs had risen significantly and that they were being subjected to abuse and mistreatment from clients who they feel are not adequately informed about the cost of veterinary care.

*Educate the public on the costs of animal ownership and veterinary bills. It is exhausting being the public's punching bag when they can't afford veterinary treatment.*

### 11.8.2 Do less

The most common response from vet nurses, when asked what they would like the RCVS to do less, was to introduce what they perceived as unclear and impractical regulations for veterinary work. Several respondents shared frustrations that they felt that regulation was brought into practice with insufficient notice, causing additional pressures on the workforce and detracting from their ability to provide an adequate level of care to clients and patients.

Respondents also requested more detailed, practical guidance to accompany new regulations to support better integration into day-to-day practice, and reduce grey areas in how policies could be interpreted.

*[There is] an increased focus on regulation it seems, which makes sense because the RCVS is a regulatory body. However, the impact is more pressure on an already crumbling workforce and decreased support to lessen the load.*

Vet nurses indicated that RCVS regulations prevented them from carrying out several tasks they felt adequately trained to perform, such as dispensing parasite control. Respondents said they would like to see the RCVS loosen restrictions on what vet nurses could do in practice, feeling this would provide them with better career advancement opportunities, ease pressures on vets, and improve the status of vet nurses.

Reflecting previous responses, vet nurses said they would like to see the RCVS be less out-of-touch from the day-to-day working within the veterinary and veterinary nursing

professions, and in turn, reduce the amount of pressure that is added to roles with each introduction of new regulation and be less bureaucratic. This includes the following perceived issues: being more open-minded, supporting individuals working in the profession more than clients, and ensuring equal attention to all grades within the profession, rather than more senior positions when developing new policies.

Another suggestion included greater transparency in decision-making to reduce how out-of-touch the RCVS can seem.

*[Stop] making so much of the council meeting reserved, so it feels all hidden. To bring the profession on board and get buy-in for all the activities carried out discussions need to be reflected in communications to add the 'why' to people's understandings, rather than the inflammatory 'this is what we're doing'.*

Other responses indicated they would like the RCVS to prioritise vets less, placing equal attention on both the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions and to stop charging so highly for membership fees.

## 11.9 Final thoughts

Finally, respondents were offered a space for any closing remarks, which mainly touched on working conditions, the restriction on what vet nurses can do, low pay and protecting the vet nurse title. Underlying numerous responses, however, is a message of passion for the veterinary nursing profession and hope for sustainable changes to ways of working to improve the experience of those working in the profession and the experience of clients and patients.

Comments on working conditions within the veterinary nursing profession encompassed flexible working, inadequate adjustments for disabilities and health conditions, and vet nurse health and wellbeing. While positive change was noted, responses suggested that the ongoing challenges being experienced in the profession would impact retention and the availability of veterinary services in the near future, especially as client expectations were often unrealistic and understanding was low.

*The culture seems to be changing for the better within practice, especially when it comes to working flexibly and mental health support, however I feel that client expectations and understanding of the profession, if anything, is deteriorating.*

Echoing earlier comments, vet nurses suggested reducing the burden on vets by loosening restrictions on what vet nurses can do. Many flagged that they are teaching vets tasks that they are not permitted to carry out, even though they have adequate skills to do so. Some suggested these changes could come in an update to Schedule 3, allowing vet nurses with additional qualifications and relevant experience to take on more responsibility.

There was a general feeling amongst respondents that the restriction of vet nurse tasks was due to a lack of trust, and an undervaluing of the veterinary nursing profession from the RCVS.

*I don't feel like registered vet nurses are trusted to do very much. There is so much pressure on veterinary services and vets that could be alleviated by giving more work to registered vet nurses... At the moment I often feel a bit professionally stunted, which is a large part of why I'm planning to leave the profession.*

A theme arising in this final question that does not appear throughout the rest of the survey is a note to monitor corporate involvement in the profession, suggesting that corporate take-overs have increased the cost of veterinary services far beyond what is reasonable, capitalising on the rising cost of living to increase profits. Several vet nurses suggested that, as they often are at the forefront of client care, they are facing the brunt of public backlash, causing them to feel demoralised and reducing job satisfaction. Some suggested the RCVS should consider monitoring vet fees in light of this.

*There are now very few independent practices, they have all been taken over by corporates and the prices have gone up massively... not in line with inflation at all. Normal people on normal wages (including vet nurses) are not going to be able to afford to own an animal, the profession [won't be sustainable].*

## 12 Conclusions

---

### 12.1 Context

The five years since 2019 have not been easy for the veterinary professions, as several surveys carried out by IES on behalf of the RCVS during this period<sup>12</sup> have shown. During the Covid-19 pandemic, vets and vet nurses working in clinical practice had to manage difficult, innovative and often unusual ways of seeing and treating animals, while also being mindful of their own safety and that of their clients; in addition, there was a big increase in remote engagement with clients, necessitating further changes in ways of working. In the aftermath of lockdown, veterinary practices had to cope with a large backlog of demand, including from first-time pet owners. Vet nurses working outside clinical practice also faced challenges, for example, adopting remote working and, for those working within vet nurse education, engaging remotely with students. These difficulties were exacerbated by staff shortages due to a variety of reasons including EU Exit, which led to a decline in European veterinary professionals coming to the UK to work, and departures from the profession due to stress and workload pressure by some vets and vet nurses. Vet nurses in clinical practice, often the first point of contact for clients, reported an increase in verbal abuse from frustrated and angry clients during and after lockdown. While the 2024 survey was live, both vet nurses and clients were experiencing the cost of living crisis, increased energy bills, and political instability at home and abroad (e.g. Ukraine). Despite these issues, vet nurses responding to surveys over the past five years have displayed a willingness and commitment to work with their colleagues to do their best for clients and, especially, for the animals in their care.

### 12.2 Evidence of trends

The **demographic profile** of vet nurse respondents has not changed substantially since IES first started running surveys of vet nurses on behalf of the RCVS in 2003. The profession remains overwhelmingly female, although there has been a small shift in the gender profile from 98% female in the 2003 and 2008 surveys, to 95% in 2024<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, there has been little movement in the ethnicity profile of respondents, with just a small downward shift in the percentage describing themselves as white, from 99% in 2003 to

---

<sup>12</sup> RCVS Covid-19 survey 2020; European veterinary professionals working in the UK: the impact of Brexit – third and final survey 2021; Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on veterinary nurses 2022; Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on veterinary surgeons 2022.

<sup>13</sup> The RCVS database gives a somewhat different picture of the gender split, i.e. 97% female (compared to 95.4% of survey respondents) and 2.8% male (compared to 3.8% of survey respondents).

95% in 2024<sup>14</sup>. Vet nurses are also younger, overall than vets, returning an average (mean) age in 2024 of 37 compared to 47 for vets; however, the mean age of vet nurse respondents has been steadily increasing with each survey, from 30 in 2008 to 37 in 2024<sup>15</sup>. Another difference between vet nurses and vets is that 93% of vet nurse respondents said they had attended a state school between the ages of 11 and 16, whereas for vets the percentage was a considerably lower 66%.

One aspect that has experienced a big change relates to the percentage of vet nurse respondents reporting a disability or chronic condition. In 2008, a low 3% said they had a disability or medical condition that limited what they could do at work, whereas in 2024, 29% said they had a mental or physical health condition or disability that had a substantial and long-term effect on their everyday activities. Although these percentages are not strictly comparable due to the wording of the question being different, the increase is noteworthy but subject to interpretation. It might indicate that the overall health and wellbeing of vet nurses has decreased, or alternatively that vet nurses are more willing to divulge their disabilities/conditions and the profession is more welcoming to those with disabilities/conditions. Another notable change is that the percentage with adult caring responsibilities has more than doubled, from 3% in 2014 and 2019 to 7% in 2024.

**Work** trends noted in previous surveys have continued. Part time working has increased from 19% in 2010 to 28% in 2024, although the 2024 percentage is only a little higher than the 27% recorded in 2019. More apparent, among those working in **clinical practice**, is the steady increase in the percentage working in a small animal practice, and the decrease in mixed practice working. In 2008 and 2014, 70% said they worked in a small animal practice, while 24% in 2008 and 18% in 2014 worked in a mixed practice; in 2024, 75% worked in a small animal practice and a low 8% in a mixed practice. Another notable trend is the rise of corporate ownership; in 2024, 62% of those in clinical practice worked in corporately-owned practices and 29% in independently-owned practices, a substantial change from 2019, when 49% worked in corporate practices and 39% in independent practices.

## 12.3 Implications for the future

The survey results highlight a variety of issues that are likely to impact vet nurses' experiences of, and attitudes to, their work in the future. Although these are presented as bullet points below, several are related and contribute towards some vet nurses experiencing a degree of disillusionment with the profession, despite the satisfying aspects that drew them into veterinary nursing, such as working with animals and making a difference.

- A high 48% have experienced harassment and/or bullying at work in the last year, with 39% experiencing this from clients and 21% from colleagues (some respondents had

<sup>14</sup> The percentage of vet nurses describing themselves as white on the RCVS database was slightly higher at 98%.

<sup>15</sup> Similarly to the survey results, the average age of vet nurses on the RCVS database was 36 years old.

experienced both). This suggests that veterinary practices, in particular, may need to put more policies and processes in place to tackle client and colleague abuse.

- Pay remains an issue that causes dissatisfaction, as it has been since the first vet nurse survey in 2003. In 2024, 59% disagreed/strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with their remuneration/salary level, while 'poor financial reward' was considered the top challenge to the veterinary nursing profession, and 'better financial reward' was the top suggestion for improvement.
- Alongside pay, the lack of career opportunities remains an issue that many vet nurses would like to be remedied; 27% thought it was one of the top five challenges to the profession, and 43% said that 'better career progression' was one of the top five improvements. Unlike human nursing, where there are many opportunities to advance, the majority of vet nurses can only become a 'senior' or 'head' nurse (although some more specialist roles seem to be appearing, such as clinical coach).
- For many vet nurses, the stress and workload pressure experienced during and post-lockdown appears to have continued, and for some, this has been exacerbated by staff shortages (indeed, 'staff shortages' was the second most important challenge to the profession, chosen by 51% of respondents). A very high 93% agreed/strongly agreed that veterinary nursing work was stressful, and 47% identified stress levels as one of the top five challenges to the profession.
- Another issue that is very apparent throughout the survey is that some vet nurses did not feel they are valued by clients and that the general public did not understand or respect their role; this is in contrast with vets, who were felt by vet nurses to be valued and understood. Almost half (47%) of vet nurse respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed that vet nurses are valued by clients, with a lower 28% agreeing, while 80% agreed/strongly agreed that vets were valued by clients. It is worth pointing out that vets did not entirely agree with this assessment, in that 45% thought clients did value the work of vet nurses. Related to this, one of the things that vet nurses would like the RCVS to do is to raise the status and recognition of veterinary nursing among the general public and focus more on vet nurse issues.
- Retention remains an issue within the veterinary nursing profession. When asked about career plans, 25% (almost identical to the 2019 survey) said they planned to leave the profession within the next five years, for reasons other than retirement. Their reasons were consistent with other survey findings, in that the top four were pay, not feeling valued, poor work-life balance and dissatisfaction with career opportunities. Those working in clinical practice were notably more likely to plan to leave the profession than those working elsewhere (26% compared to 14%). Some vet nurses also regretted choosing their profession; when asked whether, if they could start their career again, they would still become a vet nurse, 29% said no, notably higher than in 2019 (22%) and 2014 (15%).
- A further important cause for concern is that the average WEMWBS score across all vet nurse participants was 44.1, suggesting the mental wellbeing of the vet nurse workforce was significantly poorer than that observed in the wider population (the average across the UK is 51). Concerningly, this also falls into the cut-off for possible

or mild depression and has decreased in comparison with 2019 (46.2) and 2014 (47.5). Respondents who indicated that they had a disability or health condition reported a notably lower score than average (40.1), and those working in clinical practice had a lower mean score than those working outside (43.8 and 47.8 respectively). These WEMWBS findings suggest that the RCVS's focus on mental health remains very appropriate.

- Despite some worrying results, there were also many positive survey findings. Vet nurses returned positive scores for many aspects, especially relating to working with animals, being able to make a difference and feeling supported by colleagues; in addition, although some may regret their career choice, 42% said they would choose veterinary nursing again, 70% said they planned to stay in the profession for the next five years and 69% of recent qualifiers felt their course had prepared them well for working in the profession. The high levels of job satisfaction were reflected in many comments, which showed a passion for, and belief in, the job, and some optimism about the future of the profession.

## Appendix

**Appendix Table 12.1: Attitude statements about the veterinary nursing profession, percentage spread and mean scores**

	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	% agree	2024 Mean	2019 Mean	2014 Mean
Clients value the work of vets	2,909	2.1	8.2	9.7	52.0	28.0	80.0	4.0	4.1	4.3
Veterinary work gives me job satisfaction	2,890	2.5	8.4	13.9	49.2	26.0	75.2	3.9	4.0	4.2
I am familiar with the concept of quality improvement	2,878	2.2	11.5	16.5	51.6	18.1	69.7	3.7	3.8	-
Vet nurses are valued by the veterinary profession	2,929	5.2	16.7	22.6	46.3	9.2	55.5	3.4	-	-
The veterinary profession has a culture of sharing and learning from mistakes	2,942	4.4	18.4	23.6	45.8	7.7	53.5	3.3	3.5	-
The veterinary profession is diverse and inclusive	2,912	4.7	17.2	25.9	43.4	8.8	52.2	3.3	-	-
Newly qualified vet nurses have the necessary skills required for clinical practice employment from day one	2,919	4.8	22.8	19.6	46.2	6.6	52.8	3.3	3.2	3.1
I feel able to critically appraise a research study	2,719	10.6	22.6	19.7	33.3	13.8	47.1	3.2	3.4	-
The veterinary profession nurtures innovation	2,924	4.8	23.0	34.5	33.0	4.7	37.7	3.1	3.2	-

The veterinary profession offers good opportunities for those wishing to work flexibly	2,950	14.0	37.1	19.5	25.9	3.6	29.5	2.7	3.1	2.9
The veterinary profession pays sufficient attention to its environmental footprint	2,922	11.1	31.8	31.4	23.2	2.6	25.8	2.7	2.5	-
Clients value the work of vet nurses	2,916	11.8	35.4	25.2	25.8	1.9	27.7	2.7	2.9	3.2
The veterinary profession pays sufficient attention to the development of leadership skills	2,920	9.7	40.2	28.3	19.7	2.1	21.8	2.6	2.7	-
The veterinary profession offers good opportunities for career progression	2,928	17.4	34.6	21.4	23.7	2.9	26.6	2.6	2.9	3.2
Over the past five years, I have participated in scientific research	2,395	22.2	44.7	8.8	17.6	6.7	24.3	2.4	2.3	-
Veterinary nursing work is not stressful	2,917	56.4	36.7	4.5	1.7	0.7	2.4	1.5	-	-

*Note: 'Veterinary Nursing work is not stressful' has been recoded from the question 'Veterinary Nursing work is stressful' to reflect the response direction of other statements.*

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

**Appendix Table 12.2: Attitude statements about the workplace, percentage spread and mean scores**

	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	% agree	2024 mean	2019 mean	2014 mean
I am familiar with the concept of evidence-based medicine	2,850	0.4	1.5	3.5	51.8	42.8	94.6	4.4	4.1	3.7
I am able to be myself in my workplace	2,828	3.1	7.5	11.5	50.8	27.1	77.9	3.9	3.9	-
In my workplace I feel comfortable reporting and sharing mistakes	2,803	2.9	9.7	9.8	57.0	20.6	77.6	3.8	3.7	-
My workplace allows me to deliver the best possible outcomes to my patients	2,693	2.5	15.3	15.4	50.9	15.9	66.8	3.6	-	-
I actively use published evidence as part of my clinical decision-making	2,678	2.8	13.7	21.3	47.6	14.6	62.2	3.6	3.6	-
I am satisfied with the support given by others in the workplace	2,814	3.6	12.0	19.9	49.0	15.4	64.4	3.6	3.6	3.7
I actively use quality improvement in my practice	2,640	2.3	13.0	32.0	43.5	9.1	52.6	3.4	3.6	-
I am satisfied with the support given by my line manager	2,776	9.3	16.8	16.9	36.9	20.1	57.0	3.4	-	-
My workplace allows me to exercise my clinical freedom	2,650	4.9	20.3	26.8	38.7	9.4	48.1	3.3	-	-
My vet colleagues delegate tasks appropriately to vet nurses under schedule 3	2,644	9.5	20.1	14.9	39.5	16.0	55.5	3.3	-	-
I am satisfied with my salary/remuneration level	2,829	25.7	33.5	12.8	23.2	4.7	27.9	2.5	2.5	2.5

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024

**Appendix Table 12.3: Perceptions of the RCVS**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither disagree nor agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>% agree</b>	<b>2024 mean</b>	<b>2019 mean</b>
It is highly professional	2,728	1.7	3.9	28.3	53.2	12.9	66.1	3.7	4.0
I respect the RCVS	2,766	2.9	8.3	26.2	49.2	13.4	62.6	3.6	3.6
It has a good international reputation	2,742	1.8	3.7	43.9	41.5	9.0	50.5	3.5	3.8
The RCVS Council members understand the challenges of modern veterinary work	2,744	4.2	11.8	45.5	33.6	4.8	38.4	3.2	3.4
It supports the development of the professions	2,743	7.0	15.1	35.7	37.6	4.7	42.3	3.2	3.6
It is good at communicating with vet nurses	2,752	5.7	20.3	39.8	31.3	2.9	34.2	3.1	3.4
I feel I can approach the RCVS	2,750	5.6	20.8	36.8	33.1	3.8	36.9	3.1	3.4
It is empathetic and understanding	2,744	4.2	15.0	54.8	23.6	2.4	26.0	3.0	3.3
It is in touch with the issues facing vet nurses and vets	2,749	9.4	24.0	35.5	27.9	3.2	31.1	2.9	3.4
RCVS registration provides good value for money	2,765	8.2	21.6	47.8	20.2	2.3	22.5	2.9	3.2

*Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024*

**Appendix Table 12.4: Views about the purpose of the RCVS**

	N	% 1 - Not at all    2    3    4    5 – Totally					2024 mean	2019 mean
Upholds standards within the veterinary nursing profession	2,451	3.1	9.0	29.4	37.5	21.0	3.6	3.9
Is a positive force for animal health and welfare	2,437	4.2	12.1	32.5	33.9	17.3	3.5	3.8
Is fit for purpose	2,490	4.8	11.1	37.1	30.7	16.2	3.4	3.9
Sets appropriate standards within the veterinary nursing profession	2,456	5.0	13.2	32.0	32.8	17.1	3.4	3.8
Is trusted by the veterinary nursing profession	2,479	7.6	18.2	29.7	29.4	15.1	3.3	3.8
Promotes inclusion within the veterinary nursing profession	2,412	5.0	13.1	43.8	27.0	11.0	3.3	-
Is a service-oriented profession	2,435	5.5	14.4	43.2	26.4	10.5	3.2	3.5
Advances standards within the veterinary nursing profession	2,433	8.3	15.7	34.9	28.6	12.5	3.2	3.7
Supports the development of a learning culture within the veterinary nursing profession	2,409	6.6	16.4	38.6	29.0	9.4	3.2	3.6
Is ambitious in its work	2,395	6.2	15.3	44.9	23.9	9.6	3.2	-
Is forward-focused	2,438	8.5	18.0	39.6	25.1	8.7	3.1	3.5
Promotes and facilitates innovation in the veterinary nursing profession	2,412	7.7	18.9	40.9	23.7	8.7	3.1	3.5
Is proactive	2,403	6.5	18.1	45.4	22.8	7.2	3.1	-
Is compassionate	2,398	5.7	17.4	50.7	19.2	7.0	3.0	3.1
Supports the health and wellbeing of the veterinary nursing profession	2,438	9.6	22.2	38.1	22.7	7.5	3.0	3.4
Spends money appropriately	2,366	5.5	14.8	55.8	19.6	4.3	3.0	3.4
Supports me in my work as a vet nurse	2,416	13.2	21.6	39.4	19.0	6.7	2.8	-

Source: RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, 2024