

# Irish Veterinary Nurse Survey

Prepared for: Irish Veterinary Nursing Association



## Abstract:

In May 2023, the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA) launched a national survey to evaluate alterations in patterns and perspectives within the Irish veterinary nursing industry. This study extends the groundwork laid by both the 2016 Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) Survey and the 2018 IVNA/IVNU survey, with the overarching objective of identifying and addressing evolving dynamics within the profession.

Prepared by:

IVNA Committee

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## Introduction

This survey follows up on the significant findings of the 2018 National Survey of the Veterinary Nursing profession in Ireland. Commissioned by Irish Veterinary Nurses Unite (IVNU), a subcommittee of the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA). The 2018 survey was to ascertain changes in trends and attitudes following the VCI Survey which was conducted in 2016 with a goal to develop a strategy to address issues highlighted in the survey results.

Subsequently, in 2023, the IVNA undertook the current survey with the objective of assessing the progress in pay and conditions within the nursing profession since the previous survey. Additionally, it sought to establish objectives for advancing remuneration and working conditions for veterinary nurses. Administered as an online survey via SurveyMonkey, the 2023 survey questions were based on those utilised in the 2018 survey by the Irish Veterinary Nursing Unite (IVNU).

Participation was open to both qualified Veterinary Nurses and Student Nurses, resulting in 334 responses. Among these, 296 were from Registered Veterinary Nurses, 19 from Student Nurses, and 15 identified as "other" and "non-registered." With a total of 1,212 Veterinary Nurses registered with the Veterinary Council of Ireland as of March 2023, the responses to this survey represent 27.55% of those registered.

## Methodology

The IVNA conducted the 2023 survey, utilising questions derived from the preceding 2018 survey. Employing SurveyMonkey as the platform, the survey remained accessible for responses until June 2023. Invitations were distributed through various channels including social media platforms, emails to members and representative bodies, and QR codes disseminated to all delegates at the IVNA Congress 2023, ensuring broad participation.

The survey featured a diverse range of response options, from simple Yes or No queries to multiple-choice and detailed personalised selections.

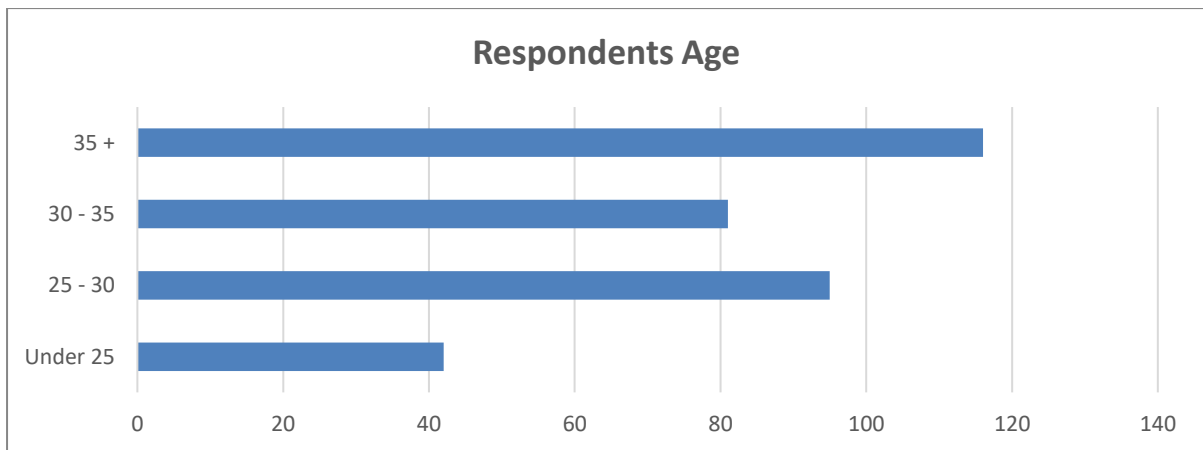
Following the collection of responses, preliminary analysis was conducted using the SurveyMonkey platform, with further examination and comparison to the 2018 survey carried out by members of the IVNA Committee. Upon completion, the results will be officially published on the IVNA webpage and shared with members.

# The Veterinary Nursing Profession

## Overview

As in the findings of the 2018 survey the profession continues to remain largely female dominated with 97.90% of respondents being female. This is in keeping and representative of the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) registration of Veterinary Nurses which in April 2023 had 97% female and 3% male veterinary nurses registered.

The current survey has found the Veterinary Nurse age demographic has changed since the 2018 survey. In 2018 the survey results found that 56% of those surveyed were under the age of 30. The current survey is showing a change in the age demographic with 41% under the age of 30 and 35% of those surveyed over the age of 35 years.

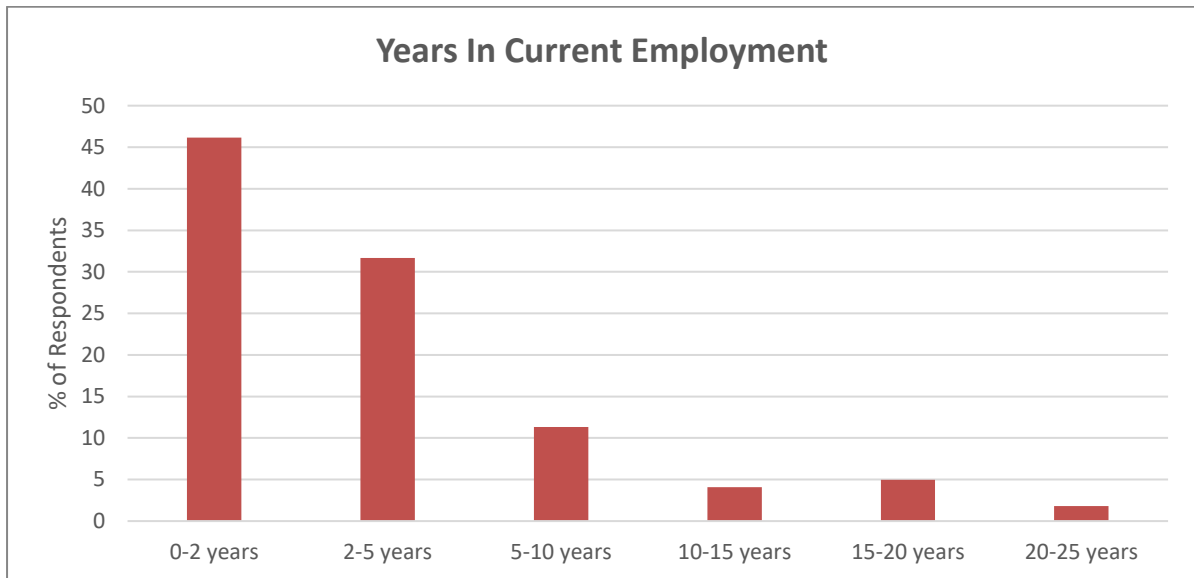


Of those surveyed 58.26% are members of the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA) while 88.62% are Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs). 5.69% of those surveyed were Student Veterinary Nurses (SVNs) while 4.49% were unregistered Qualified Veterinary Nurses.

92.47% of respondents qualified in Ireland with 26.35% graduating with a level 8 degree, 44.31% a level 7 degree, 14.97% a level 6 certificate, 9.28% a diploma in veterinary nursing and 3.29% a RCVS certificate. Almost half of the respondents graduated after 2017.

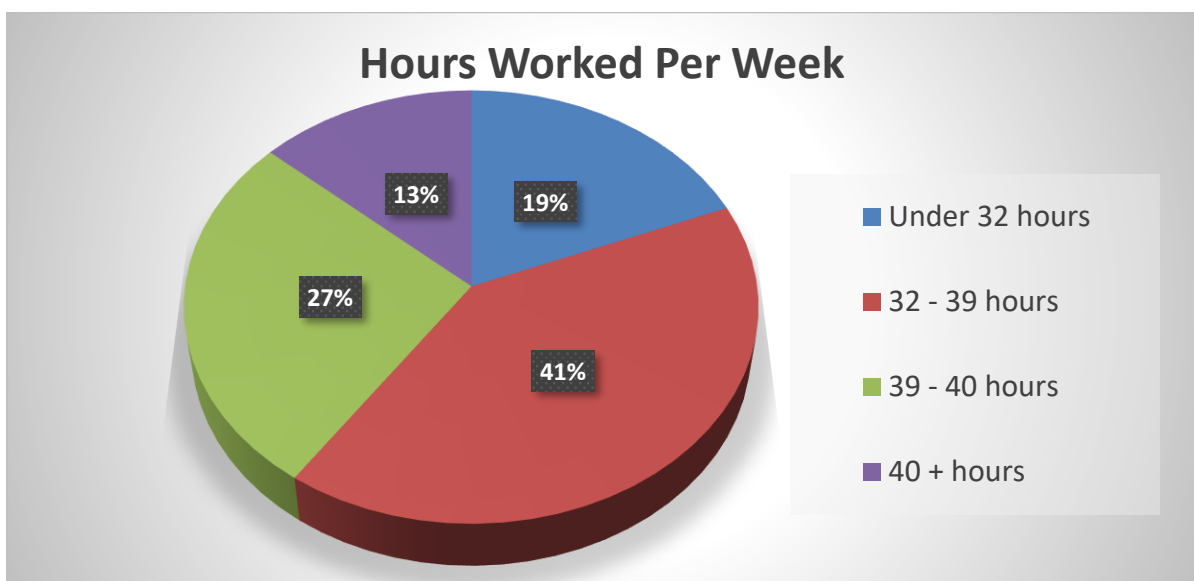
## Working Life

In relation to length of service in current employment, the longest was 23.5 years with the average being 4 years in current employment.



The majority of respondents work in small animal practice (58.29%) while 23.53% work in mixed practice. Only 1.07% surveyed work in equine practice, 6.42% in a referral hospital and 1.07% in veterinary education.

In relation to hours worked outside of overtime the majority of those surveyed work 32-39 hours per week at a response rate of 40.81%.



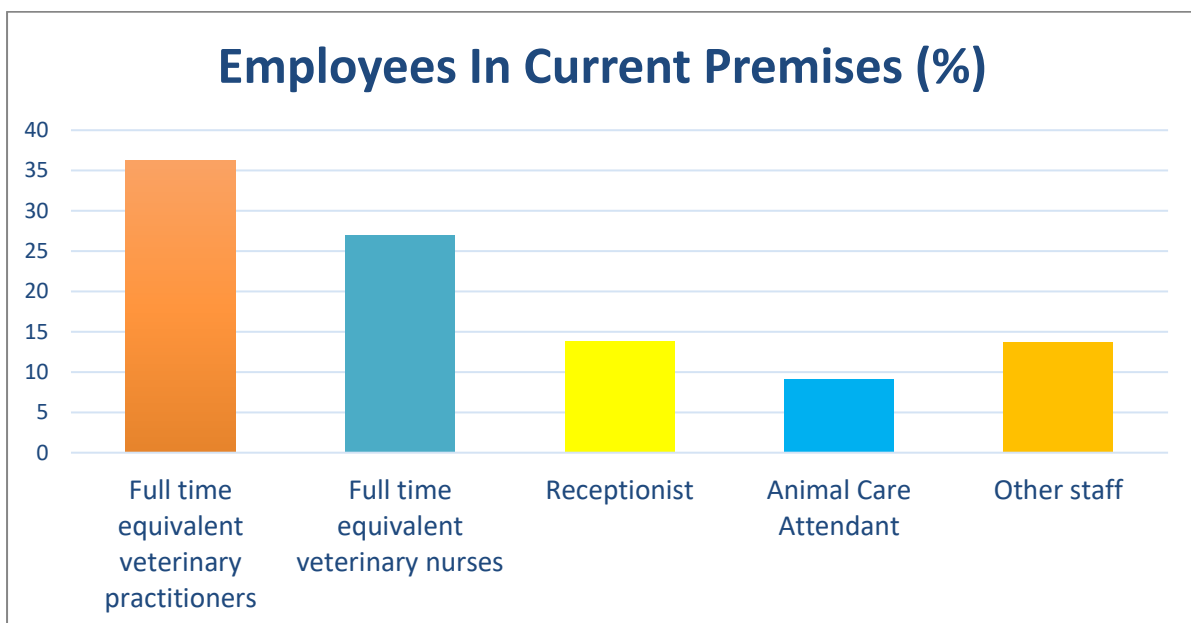
Despite the legal requirement for a scheduled break during the working day only 27.27% indicated they always take full meal breaks. Worryingly, 27.28% report only taking a full meal break half of the time.

52.91% of respondents indicated that they receive an annual pay review. Just over half of those surveyed that do receive an annual pay review gain a 1-2% pay increase annually while 24.53% receive a 2-4% pay increase annually while 20.13% indicated an annual pay increase of 5+%.

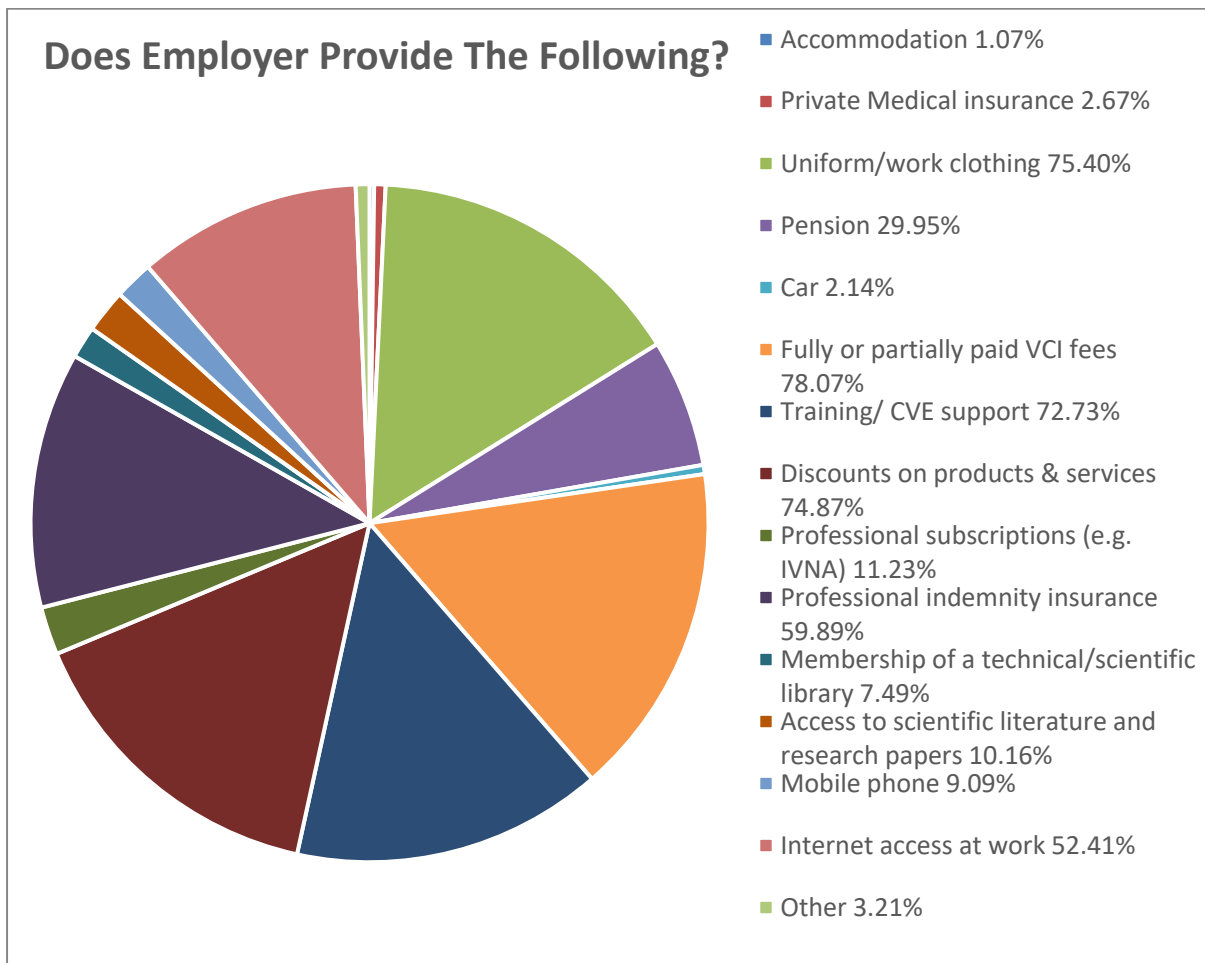
Although the number of those working a second paid job has decreased slightly from 18% of those surveyed in 2018 to 15.25% in the current survey this continues to be a surprising finding. Of those working a second paid job, 42.86% indicated this work was non-animal related and averaged 8 hours per week.

Main employment within practice was working as a nurse at 62.82% while 23.16% reported head nurse as their main employment in practice.

**Q 33.** In the premises where you normally work, how many employees are there, including you? *(The graph below shows the overall percentage representation of each profession in practice)*



**Q 42.** Working benefits were reported as follows:



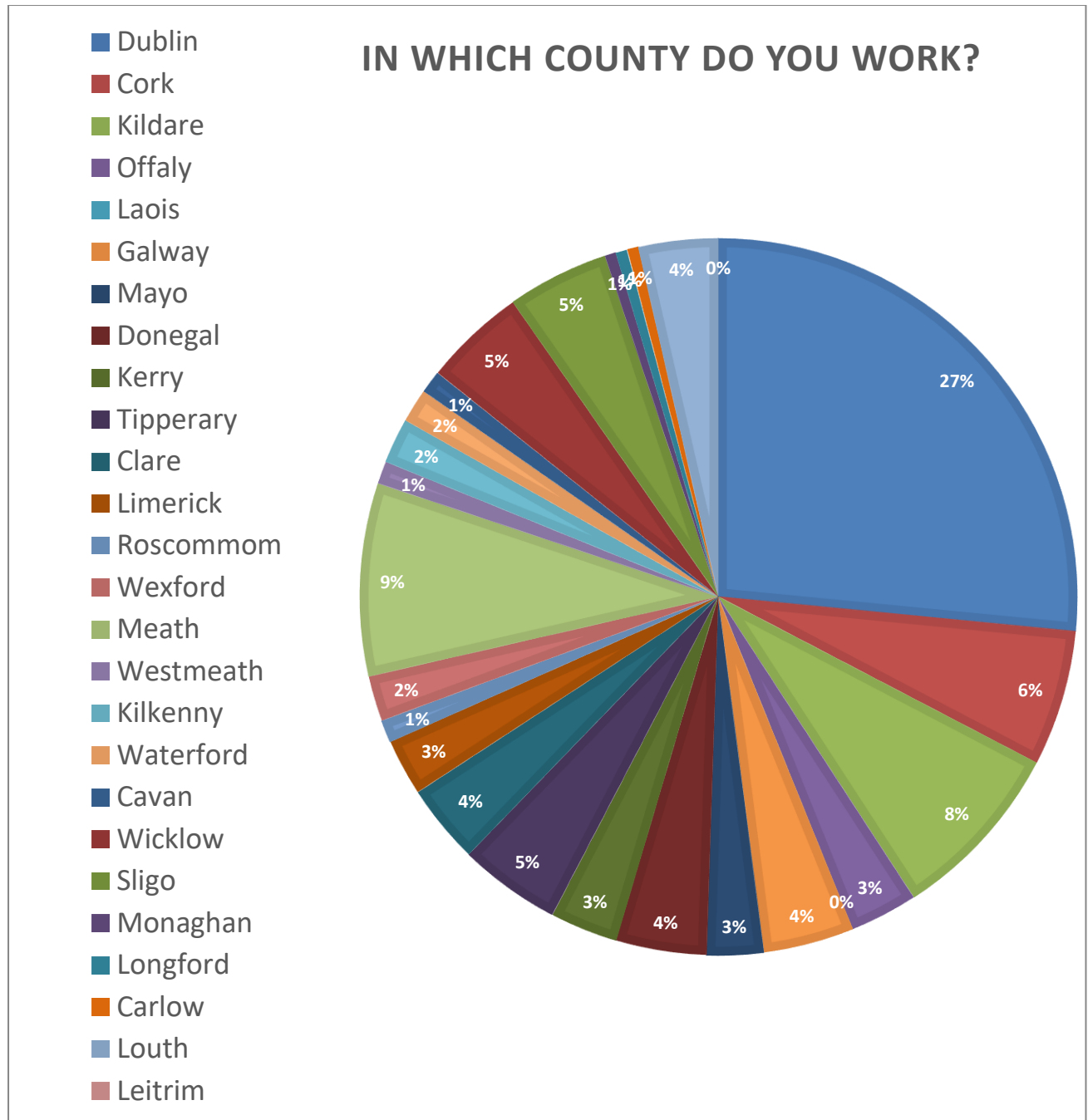
Regarding overtime, 32.62% of those surveyed are paid overtime on top of their annual wage while 39.57% receive time in lieu. Disappointingly 27.81% of those surveyed do not receive additional pay or time in lieu for any overtime worked.

Based on overall income from all respondents the average hourly rate of pay is approximately €16.90. This does not reflect working position within the practice. As a reference point, of those surveyed working 40 hours per week, the hourly rate ranged from €10.58 at the lowest hourly rate to €22.12 at the highest hourly rate of pay. As minimum wage in Ireland is currently €12.70 since January 2024 for employees over 20 years of age, €11.43 for 19 years of age and €10.16 for 18 years of age this low hourly rate of pay is concerning for a profession that became regulated in 2008. This further highlights the need for industry recognised recommended pay scales taking into account experience and location to stay in line with the cost of living differences around the country. Following on from this, it is not surprising that 80.65% of respondents indicated that there was no defined pay scale in their practice while 88.24% stated that no bonus or performance related pay scheme existed in their practice.



On a positive note, 80.75% have a contract of employment, unfortunately only 30.48% have a job description specified within their contract. 26.20% of those surveyed indicated they receive annual appraisals.

Geographically, as in the 2018 survey, main employment continues to be found in the urban areas of Dublin, Cork, Kildare and Meath with these areas making up almost 50% of employment opportunities for those surveyed.



The average travel distance to work was 23km with distances travelled ranging from 0km – 130km.

## Career Plans

The current survey reported an improved change in career plans. In 2018 there was a very worrying response that 46% of nurse's surveyed then were planning to leave the profession within the year. Thankfully this has decreased to 16% with a further 24.60% planning to leave the profession within the next 5 years. Although this may seem to indicate a more positive outcome it does mean that 4 out of 6 nurses plan to leave the profession in the next five years. On a positive note 57.22% plan to stay in the veterinary profession for the foreseeable future.

As in the 2018 survey the overwhelming reason for leaving the profession was pay with 51.16% stating this as the main factor in the current survey.

Other notable factors include:

- Dissatisfaction with veterinary nursing work (hours, stress) 8.53%
- Lack of recognition/respect 7.75%
- Care for dependants/to have family 6.20%
- Lack of progress with the VN profession as a whole 4.65%
- Not feeling rewarded/valued (non-financial) 3.88%
- Lack of career opportunities 3.10%
- Change/new challenge 3.10%
- Return to education 1.55%

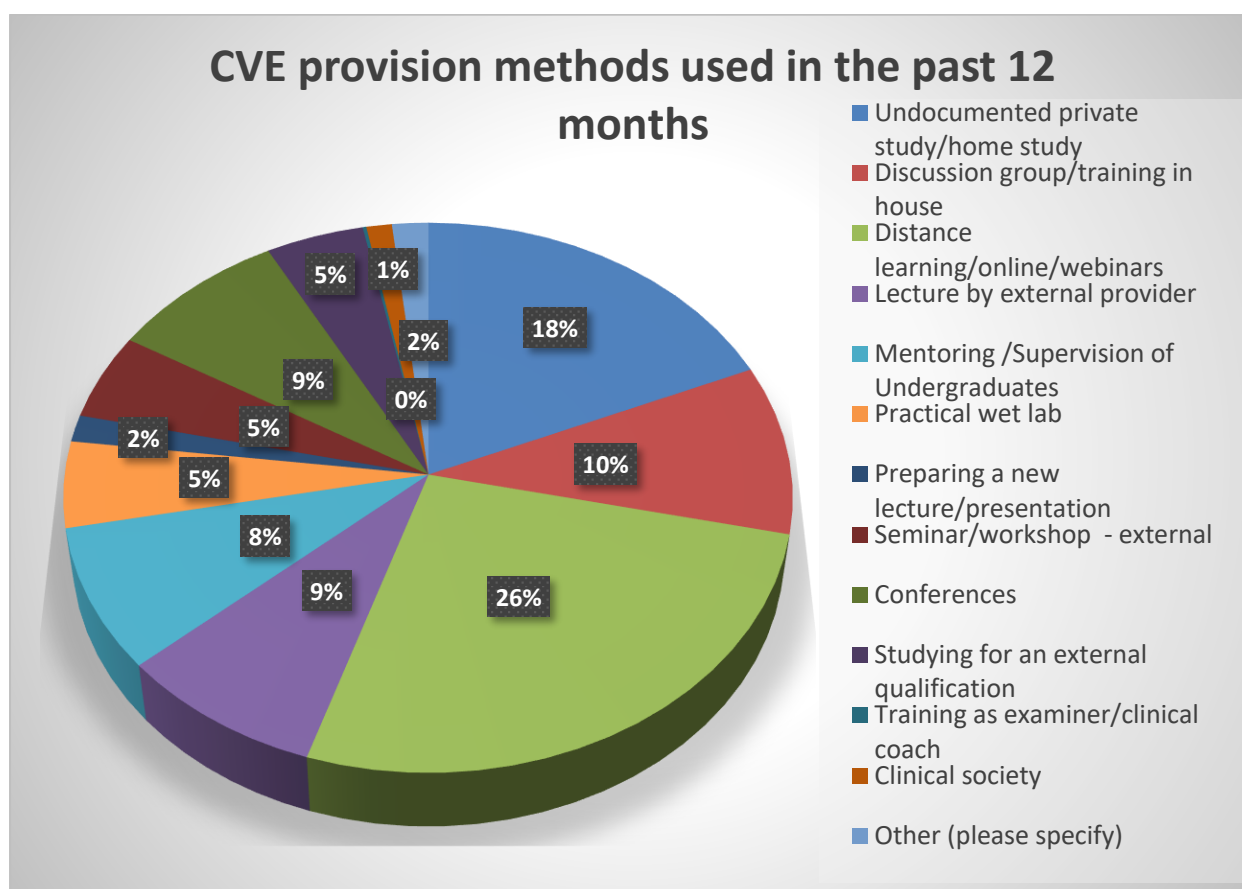
An area of improvement since the 2018 survey is in relation to the feeling of being treated fairly or transparently at work in relation to pay and conditions. In 2018, 62% of those surveyed responded No to this question. In the current survey the No response only represented 45.70%.

## Training & Further Development

Other than their primary veterinary nurse qualification there was a strong representation of nurses already gaining a post-graduate qualification or planning to achieve these in the next five years.

Choices	Currently Possess	Currently Studying	Plan To Study
Post Graduate Certificate	27.59%	15.52%	56.90%
Practice Management	26.47%	5.88%	67.65%
Bachelors Degree (veterinary related)	77.19%	0%	22.86%
Masters (veterinary related)	11.11%	5.56%	83.35%
Professional Doctorate	0%	0%	0%

To remain on the VCI register all registered veterinary nurses are required to achieve 12CPE points per year or achieve 36 every 3 years. These required points can be achieved in a number of ways. The chart below outlines the methods used by nurses over the previous 12 months prior to the current study.



CVE funding was by multiple means, 80.35% had some or all of their CVE paid for by their employer, 56.65% paid for some or all of their own CVE, 84.39% had free CVE while 36.99% had commercial sponsorship.

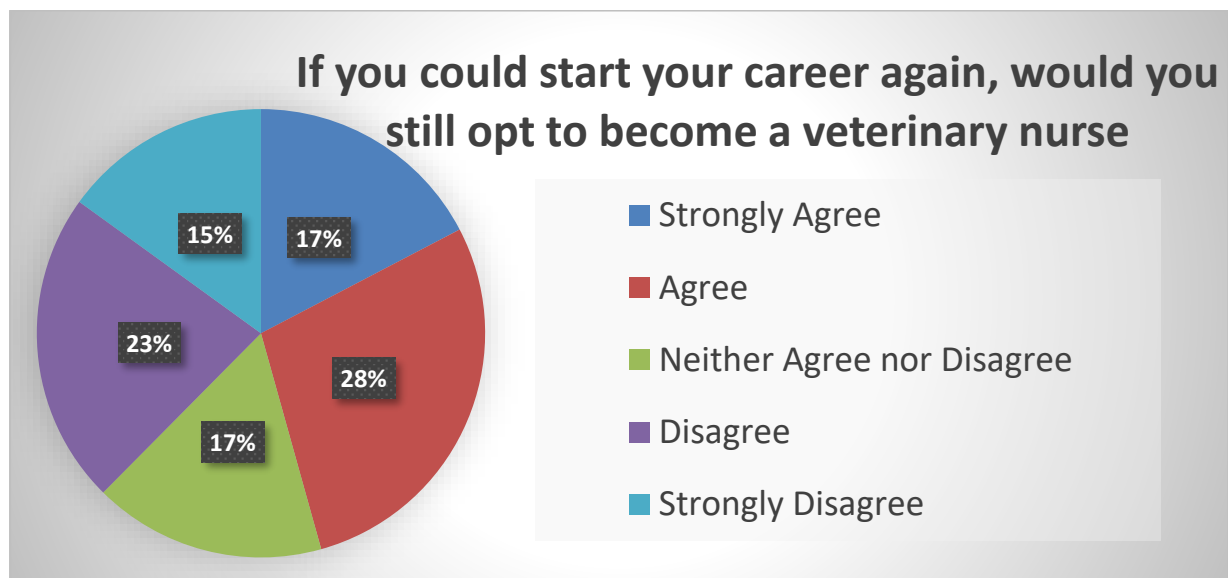
## Attitudes Towards The Profession

The current survey also presented several questions asking veterinary nurses and students nurse to detail their attitude and feelings towards their chosen profession.

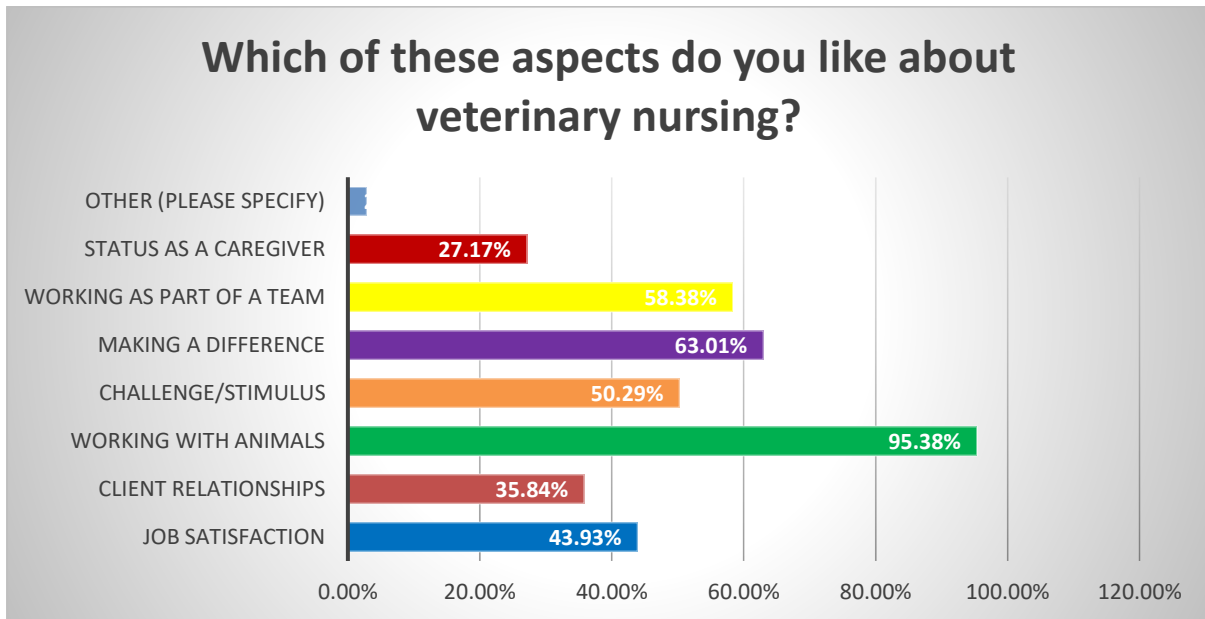
As was the findings in the 2018 survey the profession continues to offer work satisfaction and variety but remains to be seen as not “family friendly” offering opportunities to reduce hours or work part time.

As in 2018, 92.48% of those surveyed felt that newly qualified veterinary nurses need more support in their employment. In relation to preparedness for the profession 52.60% of those surveyed felt that newly qualified veterinary nurses do not have the necessary skills required for general practice employment from day one. With 86.13% believing that the demand for qualified veterinary nurses will increase over the next 10 years.

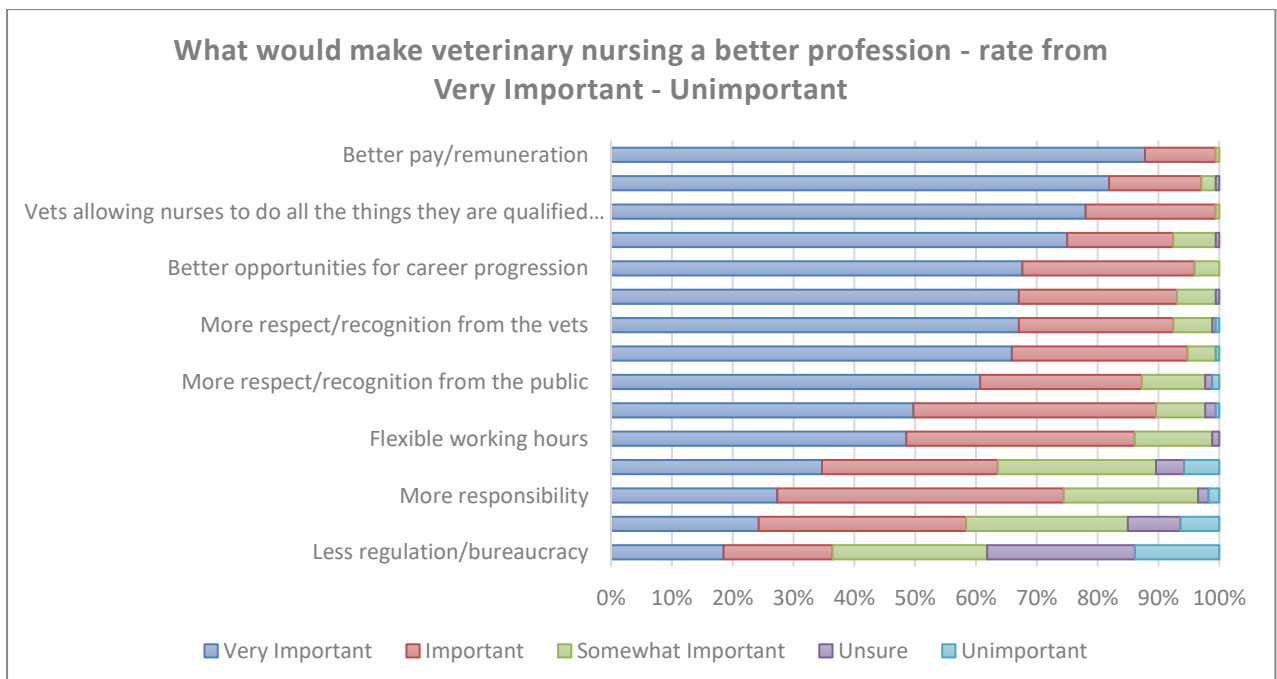
A worrying statistic in the current survey is the fact that 99.43% of respondents felt veterinary nurse work was stressful. Teamwork and team support in practice is vital and only 45.09% of those surveyed felt that veterinary nurses are valued by veterinary practitioners while 62.43% felt that veterinary practitioners don’t appreciate the scope of veterinary nurse training. Over half of those surveyed, at 58.38%, felt that clients do not value the work of the veterinary nurse.



The graph below highlights the areas that veterinary nurses stated they enjoy in reaction to their employment.

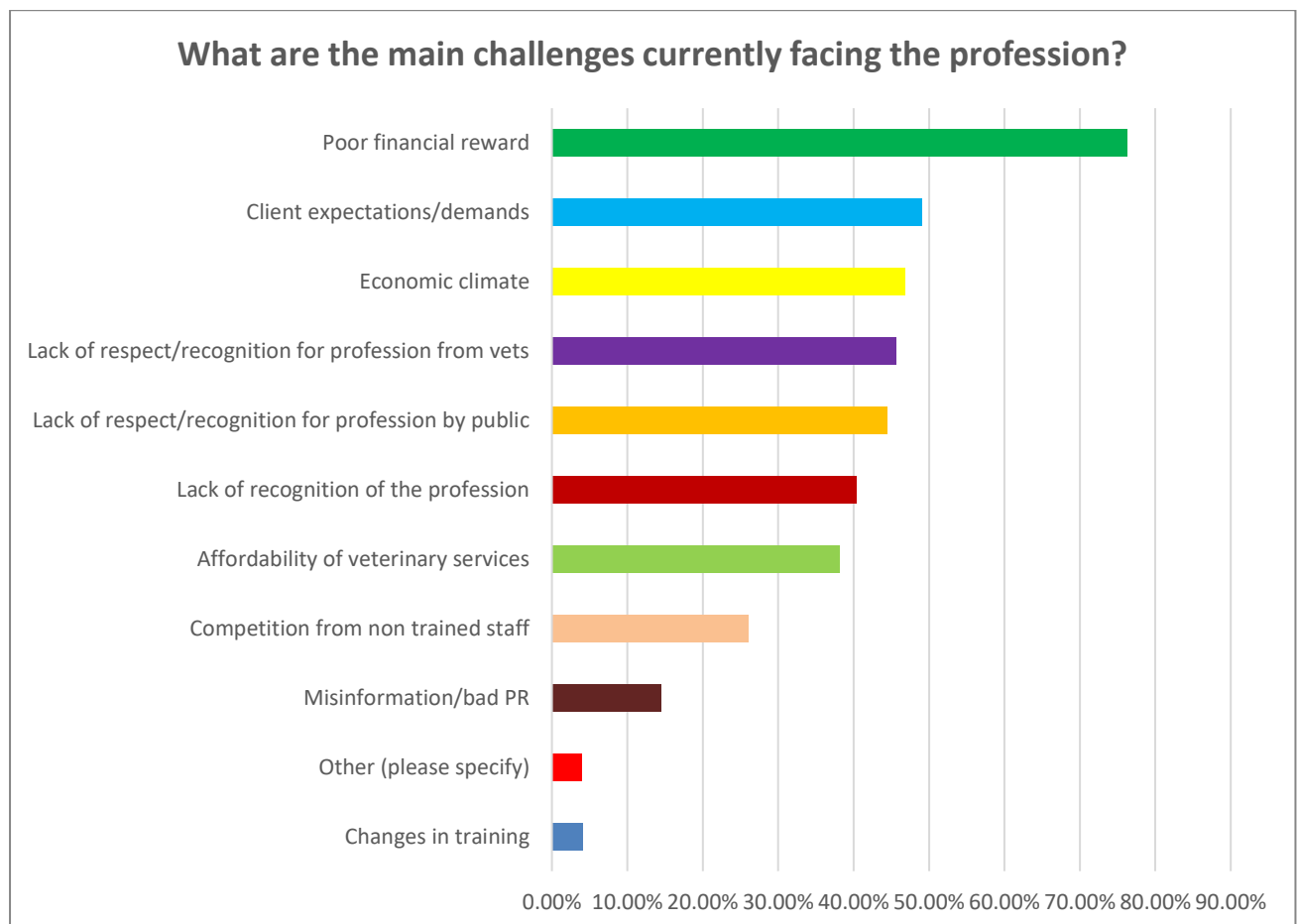


When asked what would make the veterinary nursing profession a better and more enjoyable job several areas were highlighted. As in the 2018 survey 99.42% of those in the current survey feel that an *improvement in remuneration* would lead to an improved profession to work in as would *transparency in pay scales*. 99.42% also felt that *allowing nurses to carry out tasks they are trained and skilled to do* would make the profession better to work in. *More respect from the public and veterinary practitioners* were also highlighted as important issues for the veterinary nurses surveyed. *Better career opportunities* continues to an important issue as it was in the 2018 survey.



When asked what three areas would veterinary nurses most like to see addressed, the responses highlighted and continued a similar theme. The number one issue highlighted was better pay, this was followed by a better work life balance. The third most highlighted area was vets allowing nurses to do all the things they are qualified to do. These are the same three issues highlighted for improvement in the 2018 survey.

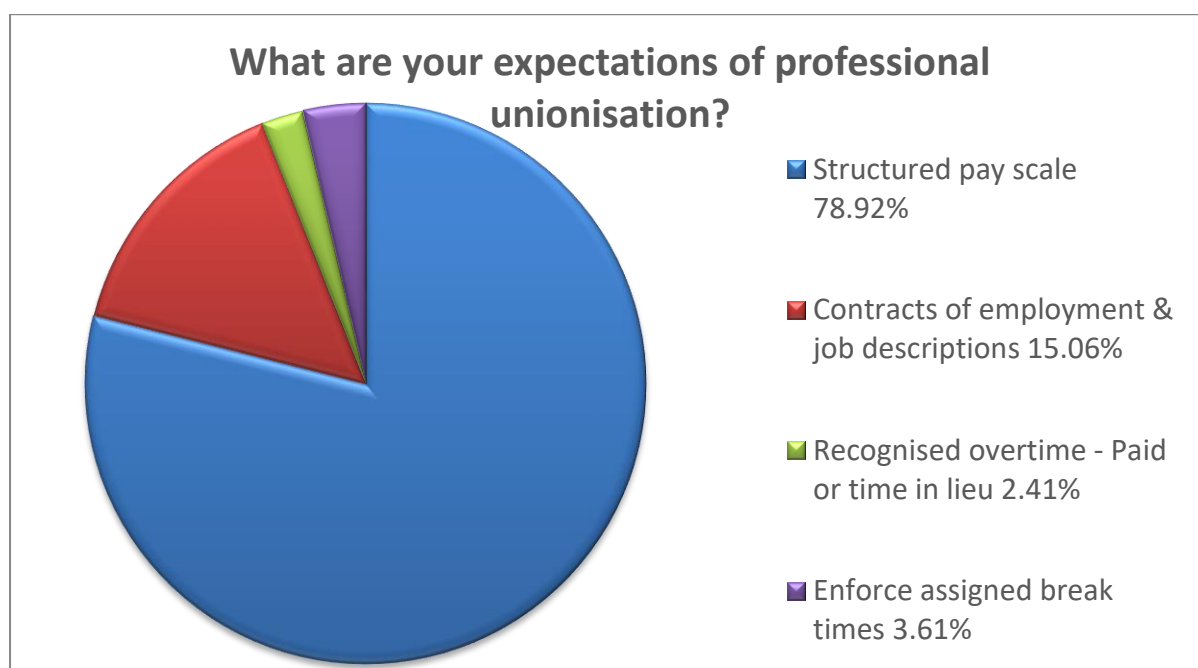
Following on from this, those surveyed were asked what they feel are the main challenges facing the veterinary nursing profession. The number one challenge highlighted was poor financial reward followed by client expectation. The third challenge was two areas of equal standing in the statistics - the economic climate and lack of respect/recognition for the profession from veterinary practitioners. Poor financial reward and lack of respect were also highlighted in the 2018 survey. The recent change in times and the cost of living crisis has clearly had an impact on those surveyed. One notable omission and a welcome change that was highlighted in the 2018 survey was the issue of competition over jobs from non-qualified staff.



When asked what issues need the most focus, the order of importance was as follows:

Issue Highlighted	Percent
Ensuring that practices are managed in a fair and balanced manner, recognising employee rights	100.00%
Ensuring that practices are encouraged to hire registered veterinary nurses	99.39%
Ensuring that veterinary nurses feel comfortable to speak up where there are issues that need to be resolved	99.39%
Ensuring that practices are encouraged to hire veterinary nurses in an open and transparent manner	98.80%
Ensuring that veterinary nurses are allowed to do all the work for which they are trained	98.80%
Encouragement of the adoption of pay scales for veterinary nurses related to experience and qualifications across the sector	96.99%
Development of pay scales for veterinary nurses related to experience and qualifications	96.38%
Ensuring that practices make allowance for the nature and scale of educational achievement in hiring and remuneration	93.98%
Encouraging practices to hire professional practice managers, who will take charge of HR, staffing and other issues	87.95%

As highlighted in the 2018 survey the current survey also found an overwhelming majority of nurses felt that there is not enough dialogue within the profession about the role and status of veterinary nurses (81.33%) or that veterinary practices are doing enough to ensure that their veterinary nurses are valued (87.95%) or their jobs are protected (84.94%). Most of those surveyed, 96.39%, feel that veterinary nurses need to become more assertive in their profession while 90.96% think the profession requires unionisation.



## Health & Safety

55.45% of those surveyed reported having their own personal dosimeter at their practice.

Just over half of respondents at 54.33% feel that their practice has adequate health and safety procedures and equipment. Although slightly lower than the 2018 survey, 47.40% still feel that their practice has inadequate equipment to safely lift and move animals.

## Comparative Analysis

Despite some minimal improvements in work and pay conditions since the IVNA survey in 2018 these issues continue to be the biggest hurdle to veterinary nurse retention within the industry. As in the 2018 survey the attitude amongst the veterinary nursing professionals surveyed has continued to have a negative trend.

In the 2018 survey 53% of respondents were planning to stay in the profession for the foreseeable future and this has increased slightly to 57.22%. Although the number of respondents planning on leaving the profession has decreased from 46% in 2018 to 40.65% in the current study this sadly still represents 4 out of every 6 nurses leaving for reasons other than retirement within the next five years or sooner. The main reasons for leaving in 2018 continue to be the main reasons for leaving in the current study, five years on, these include pay, dissatisfaction with work conditions such as hours and stress and a lack of recognition.

The main areas respondents highlighted as concerns and changes required for the profession are increased pay, utilising the skills they have been trained to perform, lack of respect from veterinary practitioners and the general public. A new concern highlighted is the economic climate as the cost of living increases and pay continues to be an issue. These two factors combined may make retention within the profession an even bigger issue.

Areas highlighted as important to be addressed include the establishment of pay scales, job descriptions, conditions of employment, transparency, respect and recognition, which were highlighted in 2018. As in 2018, a desire for unionisation continues to be important despite the profession failing to pass a vote on this previously. With over 40% of respondents working 32-39 hours per week, 15.25% have a second paid job. This is similar to findings in 2018 with 18% having a second job in that survey.

Of those working in practice only 53% receive annual pay reviews. 20% of those who don't get a pay review have never had a pay increase, while 64% received a pay increase in the last 1-2 years. For respondents who do get an annual review - 55% get a 1-2% increase, 25% 2-4% increase and 20% get over 5% increase in pay.



On a positive, it was refreshing to see that nurses' annual fees for licence to practice (78%), CVE (78%) and professional indemnity (60%) are covered by the employer for a majority of respondents. It is hoped that this trend continues and becomes standard practice for all veterinary nurse employees.

Career progression has been highlighted as an issue and the results confirm a lack of advancement with only 4% working as a practice manager/administrator, 21% working as a head nurses while 62% work as a nurse.

## **Survey Results and Implications**

The majority of veterinary nurses surveyed enjoy their work, find the role stimulating and have a reasonable level of work satisfaction (52%). However, 66% of respondents strongly agree and 33.43% agree that veterinary nursing is stressful while 70% of respondents also highlighted that the role is not family friendly. As with the findings of the 2018 survey there is a worrying trend of nurses leaving the profession resulting in retention issues. This worrying trend of 4 out of 6 planning to leave in the next five years or sooner may worsen given the new highlighted concern regarding the economic climate. With the average wage of those surveyed at €16.70 per hour and the current living wage at €14.80 it is easy to see why pay continues to be the number one issue highlighted throughout the survey regarding concerns, challenges and areas most in need of improvement.

It is hoped that the concerns highlighted are noted by the veterinary industry and relevant stakeholders and that strategies are developed and implemented to address the issues raised in order to further progress the profession and achieve a vocation that is sustainable long term.