Irish Veterinary Nurse Survey 2026

Prepared for: Irish Veterinary Nursing Association

Abstract:

In January 2026, 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, the IVNA Surveys from 2018 and 2023 and the VCI Workforce Report 2024 with the overarching objective of identifying and addressing evolving dynamics within the veterinary nursing profession.

Prepared by:

IVNA Committee

Executive Summary

Overview & Methodology

In early 2026, the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA) launched a national survey to assess evolving workplace trends, remuneration, legal compliance, animal welfare, and mental well-being within the veterinary nursing profession in Ireland. Building on prior benchmark surveys from 2018 and 2023, the 2026 survey received 372 responses including 315 Registered Veterinary Nurses, representing 22.58% of all veterinary nurses registered with the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) as of March 2026.

Key Findings

1. Escalating Retention Crisis and Industry Disillusionment

- **Severe Decline in Career Retention**: Only 24.30% of respondents plan to remain in the profession, a drastic collapse from 57.22% in 2023. A critical 75.70% are potentially leaving - 16.82% actively planning to leave, 35.98% considering leaving, and 22.90% unsure.
- **Primary Leaving Drivers**: Low pay remains the dominant driver for leaving, cited by 92.61%, up from 56% in 2018. Burnout and mental health concerns emerged as the second most prevalent factor at 81.82%, followed by poor work-life balance 61.93% and a lack of career progression 60.80%.
- **Demographic Information**: The demographic has shifted back to a younger workforce, with 57.41% under 30 years old. Over three-quarters, 77.79%, graduated in the last decade. This pattern indicates experienced nurses are continually exiting the sector and being replaced by new graduates who subsequently leave.
- **Low Professional Confidence**: Only 21.86% would recommend veterinary nursing as a career, while 47.17% state they are not confident in the future of the profession in Ireland.

2. Pay, Working Conditions, and Statutory Non-Compliance

- **Remuneration & Cost of Living**: The average rate of pay is €17.40 per hour, ranging from €12.40 to €35.00 per hour. With Ireland's 2025/2026 living wage at €15.40 per hour, nurses operate on narrow financial margins.
- **Breaches of Basic Employment Rights**:
    - Only 24.57% always receive adequate statutory rest breaks, while 34.97% receive breaks only sometimes, rarely, or never.
    - 21.04% do not have a written employment contract.
    - 15.03% do not receive their statutory sick pay rights.

- **Overtime and Benefits**: Nurses average 2.5 hours of overtime per week, but 14.79% receive neither monetary compensation nor time in lieu. On a positive note, 79% of employers now cover VCI registration fees, and 80.85% support Continuing Professional Development (CPD) costs.
- **Demand for a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO)**: 93.68% believe pay and working conditions are inconsistent across the sector, and 89.79% support a legally binding SEO to establish standardised minimum pay rates and protect working conditions.

3. Legislation Breaches and Regulatory Disconnect (VCI)

- **Breaches Witnessed**: 56.10% of respondents have witnessed breaches of veterinary legislation in their current or past employment. Witnessed breaches include:
    - Unregistered individuals performing veterinary nursing tasks (66.89%).
    - Record-keeping failures (64.90%).
    - Inadequate clinical supervision (64.24%).
    - Radiation safety violations (53.64%).
    - Lay staff falsely calling themselves "veterinary nurses" (37.75%).
- **Fear of Reporting**: 73.22% of nurses are afraid to approach the VCI to report breaches. Key barriers include a lack of anonymity or legal protection at 87.15% and fear of employer retaliation or job loss reported by 74.86%.
- **Regulatory Trust**: Only 5.76% believe the VCI effectively safeguards the interests of veterinary nurses. Key demands include an anonymous reporting mechanism, unannounced random practice inspections, and increased veterinary nurse representation on the VCI Council.

4. Animal Welfare, Physical Safety, and Client Aggression

- **Animal Welfare Concerns**: 42.62% have witnessed animal welfare or standard-of-care concerns in practice. The most frequent issues include overly physical patient handling at 36.23%, understaffing or unqualified staff delivering care reported by 17.39%, inadequate analgesia at 15.94%, and unattended post-operative patients 10.14%.
- **Pervasive Client Aggression**: 62.28% of staff have experienced aggressive behaviour from clients or visitors, primarily triggered by treatment costs at 45%. Shockingly, 15% reported extreme incidents involving physical assault, weapon threats, or death threats.
- **Workplace Injuries & Safety**: 35.92% suffered manual handling injuries. 50.81% of these involving back injuries from unassisted heavy lifting, with 69.07% continuing to work while injured.

Additionally, 50% reported feeling their personal safety was compromised at work due to faulty equipment, radiation risks, or aggressive patients.

5. Psychological Impact of XL Bully Legislation

- 56.58% believe the 2024 XL Bully legislation has negatively impacted breed welfare.
- 35.40% were involved in the euthanasia of a healthy XL Bully due to compliance issues or owner concerns, with 47.73% finding the experience extremely difficult emotionally.

<u>Key Recommendations & Priorities for Action</u>

1. **Legally Binding Sectoral Employment Order (SEO)**: Implement a binding SEO to enforce structured, experience-based pay scales, protect statutory rest breaks, and ensure proper overtime compensation.
2. **Regulatory Reform & Anonymous Reporting**: The VCI must fully establish, protect, and clearly communicate a confidential/anonymous reporting system for legal and welfare breaches, accompanied by random unannounced practice inspections and expanded nurse representation on the Veterinary Council of Ireland.
3. **Staff Protection & Zero-Tolerance Policies**: Veterinary practices must adopt strict zero-tolerance policies against client aggression, ensure adequate nurse-to-patient staffing ratios, enforce proper manual handling protocols, and mandate fear-free and analgesia training.

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Introduction

This survey follows up on the significant findings of the 2018 and 2023 National Surveys of the Veterinary Nursing profession in Ireland. Commissioned in 2018 by the 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.

In 2023, the IVNA undertook a follow on from the 2018 survey with the objective of assessing the progress in pay and conditions within the nursing profession since the 2018 survey. Additionally, the IVNA survey sought to establish objectives for advancing remuneration and working conditions for veterinary nurses. The results of the 2023 survey were published and, in 2026, the IVNA repeated the survey with additional questions focused on animal welfare, witnessing and reporting breaches in legislation. Administered as an online survey via SurveyMonkey, the 2026 survey questions were based on those utilised in the 2023 survey by the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association.

Participation was open to both qualified Veterinary Nurses and Student Nurses, resulting in 372 responses. Among these, 315 were from Registered Veterinary Nurses, 20 from Student Nurses, 29 Qualified Veterinary Nurses and 5 identified as "other" and "non-registered." With a total of 1,395 Veterinary Nurses registered with the Veterinary Council of Ireland as of March 2026, the responses to this survey represent 22.58% of registered veterinary nurses.

Methodology

The IVNA conducted the 2026 survey utilising questions derived from the preceding 2023 survey. Additional survey questions were included in the 2026 survey to gain further insights into the veterinary nursing profession with regard to animal welfare, health and safety, work-related injuries within the workplace, attitudes regarding the recently introduced XL bully legislation and viewpoints on compliance of veterinary legislation and confidence with reporting breaches to the regulator, Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI).

Employing SurveyMonkey as the platform, the survey remained accessible for responses until March 2026. Invitations were distributed through various channels including social media platforms, emails to members and representative bodies soliciting broad participation.

The survey featured a diverse range of response options, from simple Yes or No queries to multiple-choice, all that apply and detailed personalised open-question selections with free comment text boxes.

Following the collection of responses, preliminary analysis was conducted using the SurveyMonkey platform, with further examination and comparison to the 2018 and 2023 surveys 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

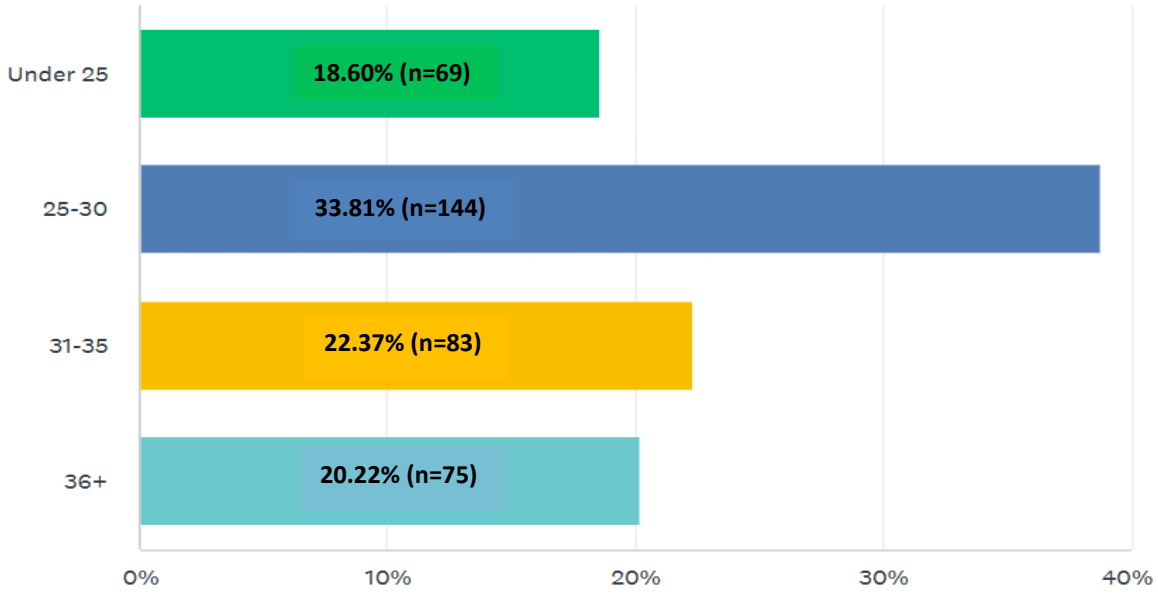
Overview

As in the findings of the 2018 and 2023 surveys the profession continues to remain largely female dominated with 95.66% (n=353) of respondents identifying as female. This is in keeping and representative of the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) registration of Veterinary Nurses which in March 2026 had 96.84% (n=1,351) identifying as female and 3.15% (n=44) identifying as male veterinary nurses on the register.

The current survey has found the Veterinary Nurse age demographic has returned to a similar trend noted in the 2018 survey. In 2018, the survey results found that 56% of those surveyed were under the age of 30. The 2023 survey showed a change in the age demographic with only 41% under the age of 30 and 35% of those surveyed over the age of 35 years.

The 2026 survey results show that 57.41% (n=213) of respondents under the age of 30 with 22.37% (n=83) aged between 30-35 years of age and 20.22% (n=75) over the age of 35.

Respondents Age

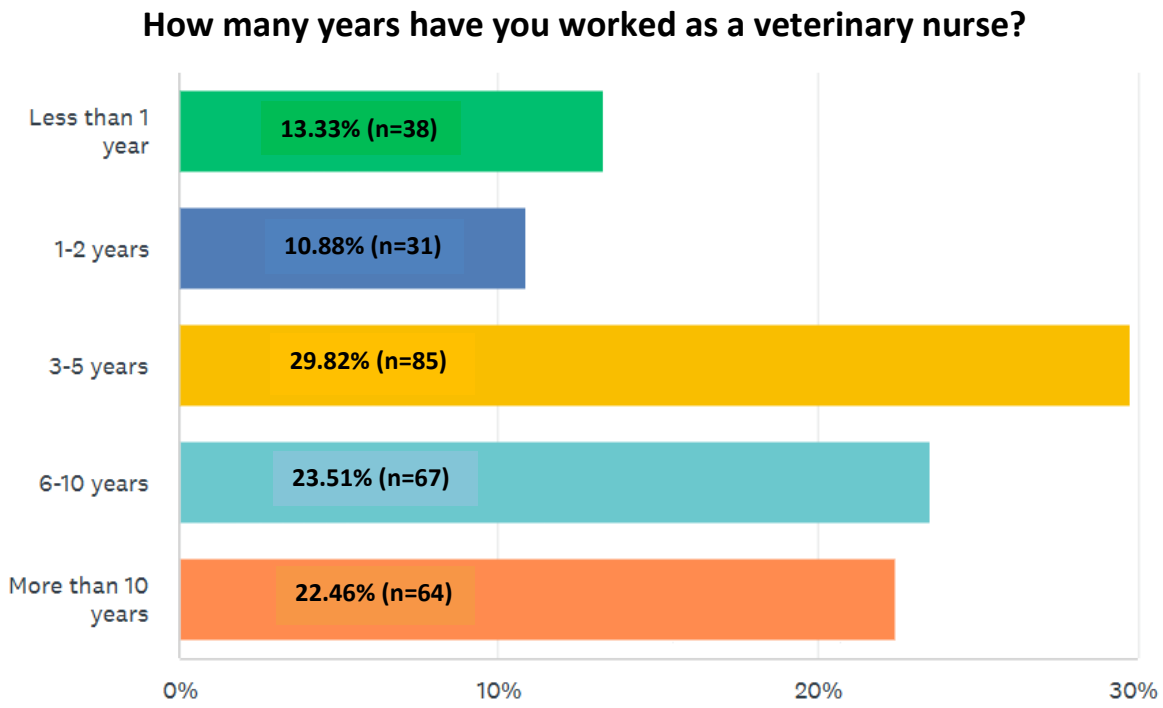


Of those surveyed 44.70% (n=97) are members of the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA).

Over ¾ of respondents had graduated in the last 10 years with 77.79% (n=273) graduating after 2016 while 48.16% (n=169) graduated in 2021 or later.

Working Life

In relation to the number of years working as a veterinary nurse the most common response was 3-5 years at 29.82% (n=85). Regarding length of service in current employment, the longest was 23.5 years with the average being 4 years in current employment.

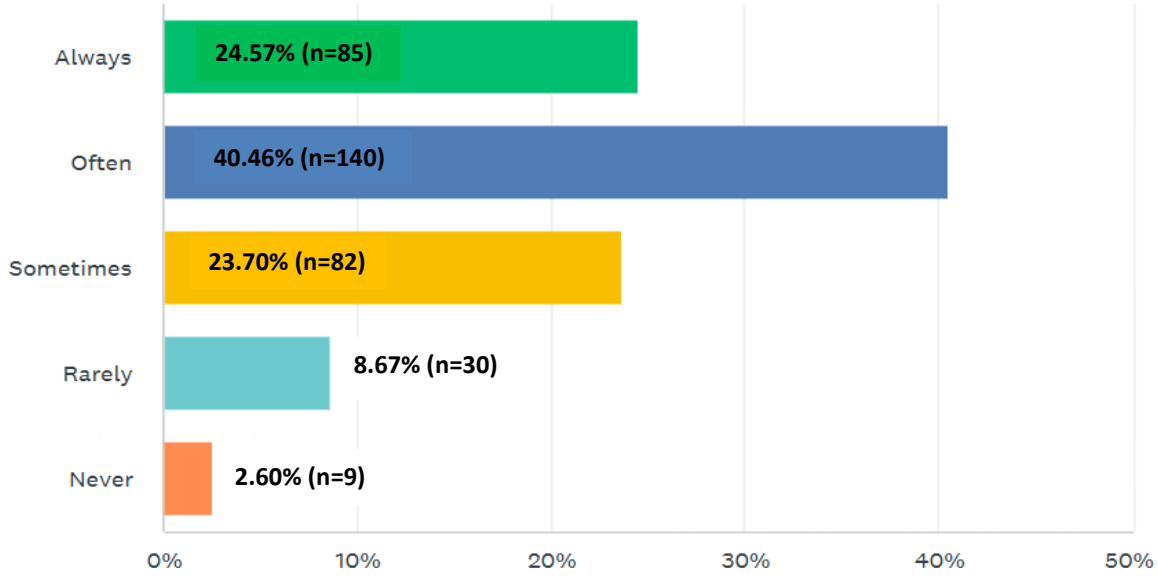


As in the previous surveys, the majority of respondents work in small animal practice at 53.12% (n=196) while those working in mixed practice have increased slightly from the 2023 results from 23.53% to 25.20% (n=93). The number working in equine practice remains the same at only 1.90% (n=7). Nurses working in a referral hospital setting have increased from 6.42% in 2023 to 7.32% (n=27) in the current study. Nurses working in emergency out of hours is 2.98% (n=11). The number of nurses working in education remains similar to previous results at 1.90% (n=7). 1.08% (n=4) report working in industry in a non-clinical setting while there were no nurses who participated in the survey currently working in large/farm animal practice.

In relation to hours worked before overtime, the average was 36 hours per week with the lowest hours per week reported at 4 and the highest at 91 hours per week

Despite the legal requirement for a scheduled break during the working day which under current Irish law workers are entitled to a 15 minute break after working more than 4.5 hours, and a 30 minute break after working more than 6 hours. Only 24.57% (n=85) indicated they always receive an adequate break. This is lower than the 27.27% in the same category in the 2023 survey. Worryingly, 34.97% (n=121) report only getting an adequate rest break, sometimes, rarely or never. While 78.61% (n=272) reported having a canteen/staff room, meaning 1 in 5 of those surveyed have no dedicated break or staff space.

Do you receive adequate rest breaks during your shifts?



The Workplace Relations Commission states that under the Terms of Employment (Information) Act, 1994, an employer must also provide each new employee with a written statement of terms of employment within one month of commencement of employment. The 2026 survey reports that 21.04% (n=73) respondents do not have an employment contract while 70 respondents also never received the required Day 5 Statement of Terms.

56.07% (n=194) reported to be somewhat aware of their employment rights while 24.56% (n=85) are not aware of employment rights in Ireland. Should an employment rights issue occur, 72.83% (n=252) of respondents are unsure or do not know where to seek confidential advice or support.

Rates Of Pay

Rates of pay ranged from €12.40 - €35.00 per hour with the average rate of pay €17.40 per hour. From 1st January 2026 the minimum wage in Ireland is €14.15 while the 2025/2026 living wage is €15.40 per hour. Living wage is defined as the average gross salary a single adult (without dependents) working full-time, needs to afford a socially acceptable minimum standard of living.

Of those who reported a pay increase in the previous 12 months, the average increase in pay per hour was €1.66. Where a percentage increase was applied the average was 3.67%. The number of respondents who have a formal or informal pay scale was low at only 30.88% (n=88).

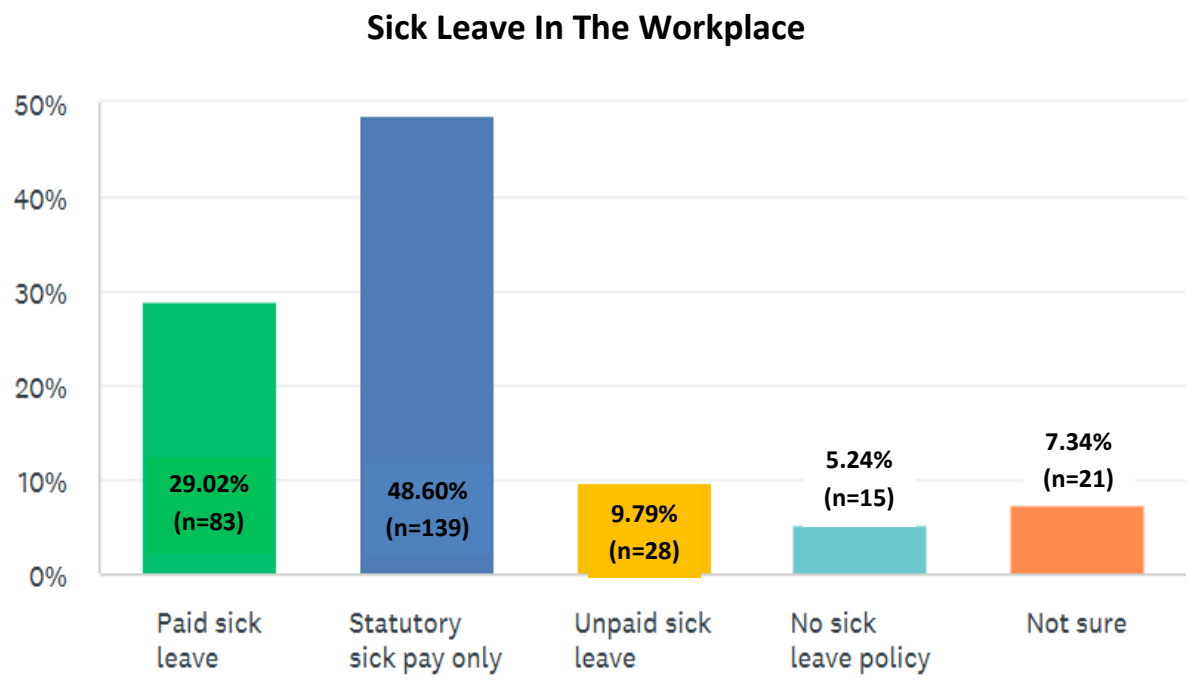
Overtime

The average number of overtime hours worked per week was 2.5 hours with a maximum of 20 hours reported. Regarding no compensation for overtime 14.79% (n=42) of respondents report no payment or time in lieu for overtime worked. Although this has decreased from 27.81% of those in the 2023 survey it is still concerning and disappointing to see workers not remunerated for additional time worked. On a positive note, in this area 4.58% (n=14) are paid at a higher rate while 25% (n=71) are paid at their standard rate of pay while the majority at 55.63% (n=158) receive time in lieu. Only a minority of those surveyed report receiving additional rates of pay for working weekends (12.65%, n=35), bank holidays (16.25%, n=45), on call (9.39%, n=26) and nights (6.50%, n=18).

30.28% (n=86) of those surveyed reported being on call and available for emergency was part of their working conditions with only 45.36% (n=44) compensated for this work.

Sick Pay

Since 1 January 2024, all employees have a right to 5 days' sick pay a year - increased from 3 days in 2023. This is called Statutory Sick Pay, meaning it is the legal minimum. Sick pay is paid by the employer at 70% of an employee's normal pay and up to a maximum of €110 a day. To be entitled to this an employee must be working at least 13 weeks in that employment. An employer can have a more generous sick pay scheme, but they cannot give less than the statutory amount. Survey findings show that 15.03% (n=43) of those surveyed are not receiving their legally required statutory rights in this area.



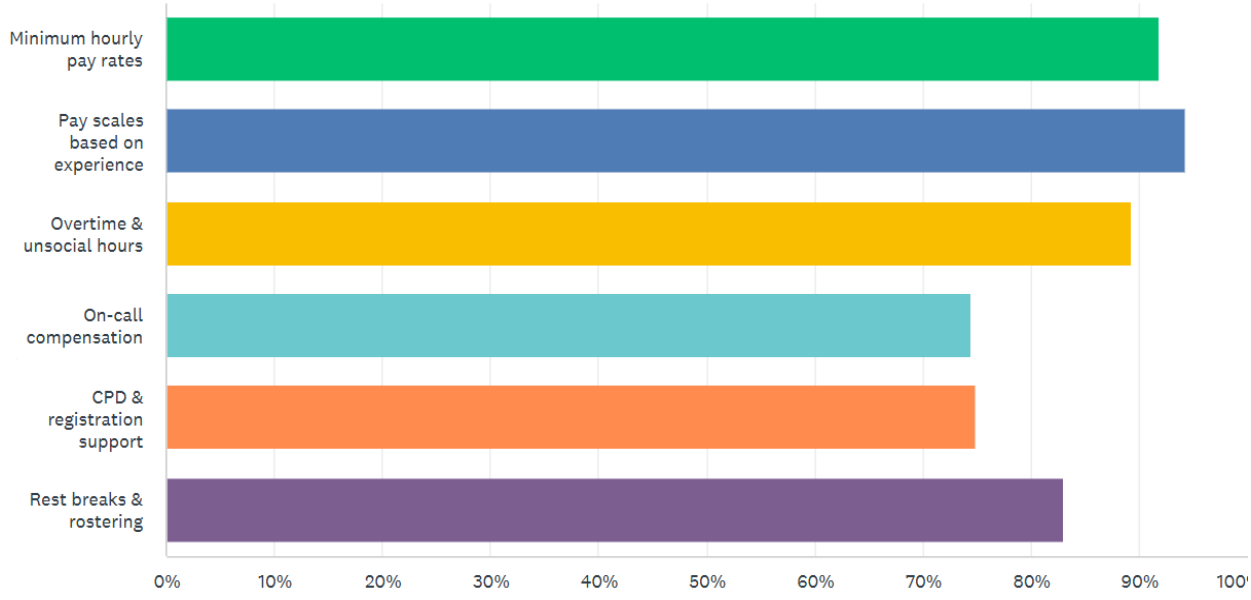
Additional Employee Benefits

Continuing Veterinary Education (CVE) refers to the ongoing professional development activities that veterinary practitioners and nurses must undertake to maintain and enhance their skills. Every registered veterinary nurse must complete 12 CVE credits annually. These credits can be achieved through a combination of formal education such as lectures, approved CVE courses, and recognised international learning events and conferences, and informal learning such as self-study, online courses, and professional reading. This is also commonly referred to as continuing professional development (CPD). 48.58% (n=137) reported that their employer covered their CPD fees and they paid for their time to attend CPD events. 32.27% (n=91) reported CPD fees only were paid by their employer while 2.84% (n=8) were only paid for their time but had to cover the CPD costs themselves. Only 16.31% (n=46) of respondents reported that their continuing professional development (CPD) requirements were not supported by their employer.

A continuing trend in the 2026 survey is the low number of respondents at 20.79% (n=58) paying for their own VCI registration fee which increased from €225 in 2024 to €245 in 2025 per annum. This is a similar finding to the 2023 survey.

When asked if working pay and conditions for veterinary nurses were consistent across the profession an overwhelming 93.68% (n=267) believed this was not the case highlighting a potential need within the profession for regulated pay scales based on experience and the requirement for a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) to provide consistency across the profession and help address the ongoing recruitment and retention issues identified in all surveys to date. An SEO sets the minimum hourly rates for workers within that sector, but this does not prevent an employer paying a higher rate of pay than defined in the SEO. When asked if a legally binding SEO is necessary for veterinary nurses in Ireland a strong majority of 89.79% (n=255) agreed that this is required with 9.86% (n=28) unsure.

Which areas should a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) cover?



Career Plans

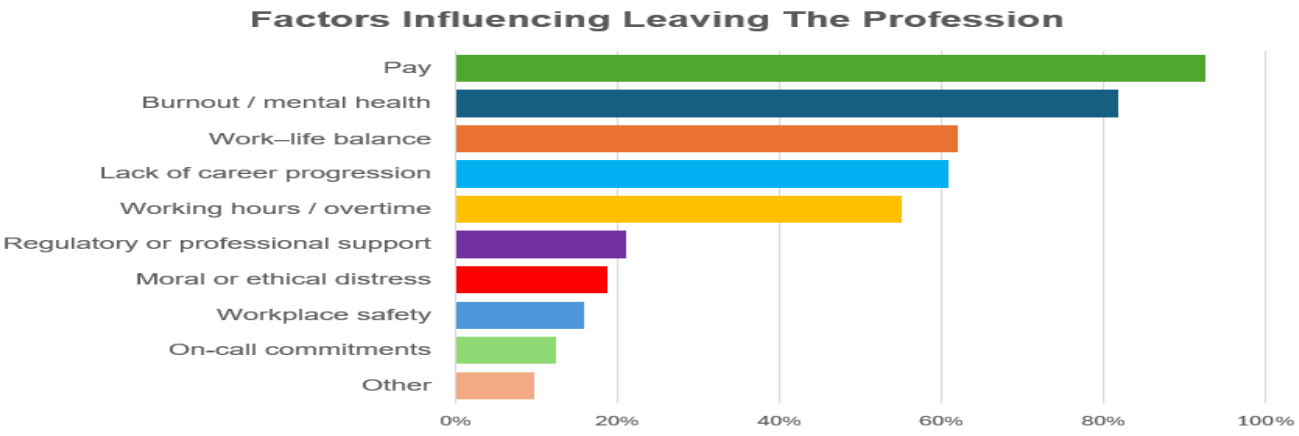
A worrying concern in every survey to date has been the retention of veterinary nurses. In 2018, almost half of those surveyed (46%) were planning to leave the profession within a year. The 2023 survey noted that a slightly decreased but similar number, at 40.60%, of those surveyed were planning to leave the profession within the next five years – 16% within one year, 24.60% within five years.

Based on the results of this survey, the profession finds itself in a very concerning situation as 16.82% (n=36) are actively planning to leave the profession, 35.98% (n=77) are considering leaving, while 22.90% (n=49) are unsure. This results in a total of 75.70% (n=162) potentially leaving the profession. Only 24.30% (n=52) of those who responded stated they plan to remain in the profession. This is a considerable change from the 2023 results where 57.22% were planning to stay in the profession for the foreseeable future.

Remuneration was the predominant reason for leaving the profession, with 92.61% (n=163) citing pay as the main contributing factor. This remains consistent with the findings of the 2018 and 2023 surveys. Similar to the 2018 and 2023 surveys, work life balance, a lack of career progression and working hours featured strongly as reasons for leaving. A new addition to reasons for leaving was burnout and mental health within the profession. This was the second most common reason for leaving and stresses the importance of intervention by the profession or regulator. This aligns with the VCI's Mental Health in the Veterinary Profession in Ireland survey from 2021 which found veterinary nurses indicated higher levels of psychological distress, self-harm, and suicidal behaviour than other veterinary professionals. Mental fatigue and burnout can impair clinical judgement, reduce retention and affect the delivery of patient care.

Notable factors for leaving the profession include:

1. Pay 92.61% (n=163)
2. Burnout and mental health 81.82% (n=144)
3. Worklife balance 61.93% (n=109)
4. Lack of career progression 60.80% (n=107)
5. Working hours and overtime 55.11% (n=97)



Breaches of Veterinary Legislation

A new set of survey questions regarding breaches of veterinary legislation were included in the 2026 survey. 81.75% (n=206) of respondents described themselves as 'somewhat to extremely familiar' with the Veterinary Practice Act 2005 and other relevant legislation. 56.10% (n=138) of respondents reported witnessing breaches of veterinary legislation in their current or previous employment. Some issues highlighted in the free comments box included lay people and/or Animal Care Assistants (ACA) performing acts of veterinary nursing at 41.81% (n=23). Also noted were veterinary nurses performing tasks outside their remit such as minor surgeries (e.g. cat neuters) that are reserved for veterinary surgeons.

Breaches in relation to medications was the next most common issue at 25.45% (n=14). Highlighted breaches include lack of schedule 3 recording, and prescribing and dispensing of medications to patients without the required clinical assessment by a veterinary practitioner within the previous six months. 10% (n=7) of respondents reported record keeping failures and this included failing to record controlled drugs and falsifying clinical records.

Radiation concerns included taking radiographs without appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), students present during exposures and using substandard equipment at 12.72% (n=7). 21.54% (n=28) of reported breaches were witnessed within the month prior to completing the survey, 13.85% (n=18) within the previous 6 months, 31.54% (n=41) within the previous eighteen months and 33.08% (n=43) of reported breaches witnessed over 2 years ago.

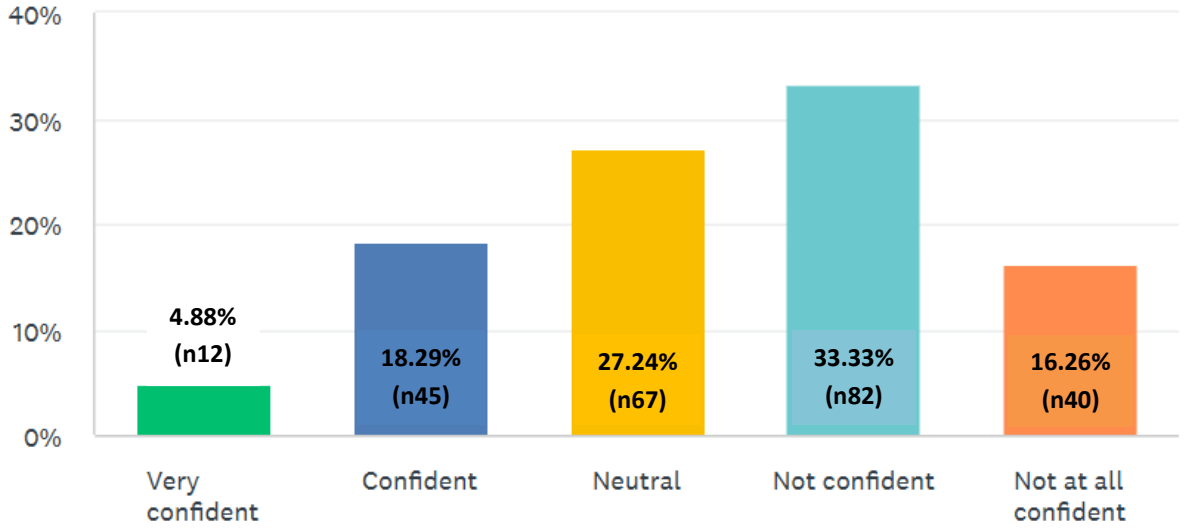
151 respondents answered the survey question asking to choose all breaches witnessed from a selection. The most commonly selected breach was unregistered individuals performing acts of veterinary nursing at 66.89% (n=101). The high number of responses suggests a serious concern for patient welfare within the practice setting that requires immediate and effective regulator intervention. A further 37.75% (n=57) reported lay staff referring to themselves as Veterinary Nurses which is a legally protected title in Ireland since 2008 and can only be used by a qualified and registered individual.

Breaches of Veterinary Legislation Witnessed	
Unregistered individuals performing veterinary nursing duties	66.89% (n=101)
Record keeping failures	64.90% (n=98)
Inadequate supervision	64.24% (n=97)
Radiation safety breaches	53.64% (n=81)
Breaches of anaesthesia/sedation protocols	44.37% (n=67)
Lay staff calling themselves "veterinary nurses"	37.75% (n=57)
Other	7.28% (n=11)

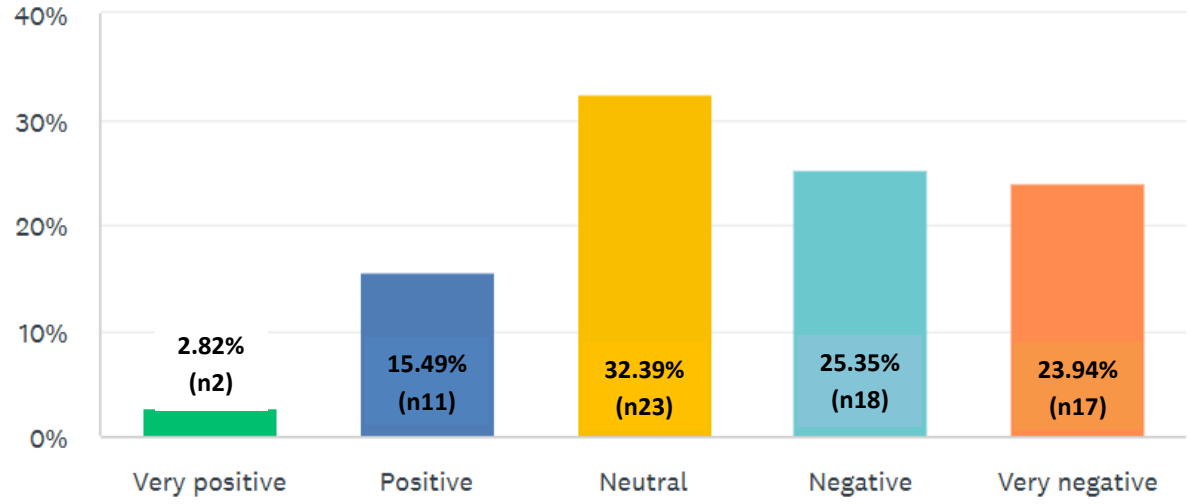
Comments under 'Other' included dispensing drugs without a valid prescription and lay staff dispensing medications.

Reporting Breaches

When asked how confident respondents feel in identifying and reporting breaches the following was reported.



Despite the high number of breaches identified, only 2.09% (n=5) have reported concerns to the regulator, VCI, while 25.52% (n=61) have reported breaches to their employer. Of this, 49.29% (n=35) of respondents stated reporting the breach was negatively received.



In the free comment box, some individuals reported that complaints were acted on and the issue improved however, others reported no change in the issue(s). The majority of comments reflected that the issue was ignored and some respondents faced retaliation for reporting the breach to their employer.

Animal Welfare/Standard of Care Concerns

Another new addition to the 2026 survey was questions regarding animal welfare concerns. Responses regarding animal welfare concerns reveal significant barriers to internal reporting and a perceived lack of accountability. 60% (n=41) of those who responded highlighted management as being dismissive of concerns raised.

When asked if respondents had witnessed any concerns related to animal welfare and/or standards of care within the practice, 42.62% (n=101) selected 'Yes.' Of the 69 comments that followed regarding animal welfare and standards of care 'concerns' the most commonly reported issue related to poor or overly physical handling of patients at 36.23% (n=25). The next most commonly reported issue was regarding a lack of sufficient staff numbers and appropriately qualified staff at 17.39% (n=12) which respondents felt resulted in poor patient care. Included in this was the issue of lay staff performing acts of veterinary nursing without the required knowledge or competent clinical skills resulting in poor standards of care. Inadequate analgesia was frequently reported at 15.94% (n=11). Potentially linked to a lack of staff or adequately trained staff, the next most common concern at 10.14% (n=7) was patients being left unattended. This included patients being unattended in the immediate post-operative period and overnight despite requiring ongoing observation.

Respondents stated that when reporting welfare or standards of care concerns this often resulted in staff being told it is 'not their concern', to 'continue on regardless' or being threatened with redundancy. Even when the issue was acknowledged, 25% (n=17) of respondents felt concerns were "brushed off" or that "nothing changed" following a conversation. Up to 10% (n=7) of respondents reported being dismissed or facing a "toxic" environment after raising concerns. A small minority at 5% (n=3) reported a positive outcome from reporting concerns and that actions were taken to rectify issues raised.

The animal welfare and standards of care issues raised above are very concerning and may highlight the need for further training. As undergraduate training and education evolves and improves, enhanced techniques and monitoring aids can provide improved patient assessment and treatment. For example, Fear Free Handling Techniques reduce the need for excessive handling of animals providing alternative animal-friendly approaches that also improve staff safety. However, if staff are unaware of this training, then the appropriate handling techniques cannot be applied. Regulator and institution level intervention may assist with such issues by ensuring all undergraduate veterinary profession students receive Fear Free training and certification. The regulator could consider including Fear Free Training as part of the registration requirements or stipulating that all staff listed in the Practice Accreditation Scheme (PAS) must have suitable Fear Free Training.

The same may be true with regard to the issue of inadequate analgesia that was frequently reported. The use of species-specific pain scoring systems and training in their use at undergraduate level may be leading to increased identification of inadequate analgesia. There may be underlying issues regarding speaking up or being heard in the practice setting.

Solutions might include the requirement for interprofessional education (IPE) during undergraduate training which allows differing professions to learn, with, from and about each other. This will help veterinary practitioners and nurses to learn about each other's unique role in patient care and the similarities in approach to patient care. Improved and ongoing communication training using evidence-based frameworks and toolkits may be required to facilitate open and honest communication without reprisal to the benefit of the patients under veterinary care.

Attitudes Towards Regulator - Veterinary Council of Ireland

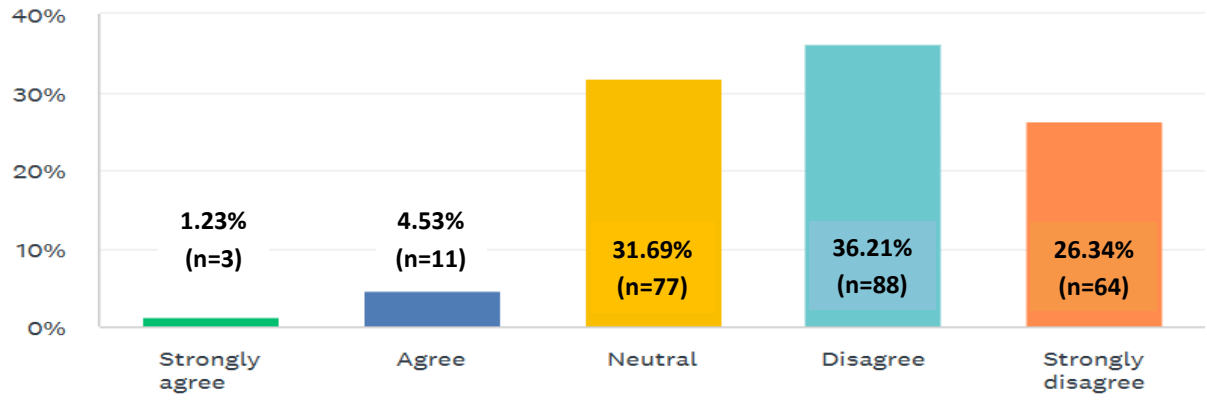
Although minimal in frequency, there were some competency and ethical concerns raised in the breaches of legislation comments. These and some of the issues outlined above warrant formal complaint to the regulatory body, the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI). Survey questions regarding the VCI were added to the 2026 survey.

Survey feedback regarding the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) suggests a significant disconnect between the regulator and the nursing profession. Respondents reported ineffective and delayed communication from VCI with frequent reports of replies taking too long. A major barrier to reporting issues or breaches is the lack of anonymity. This was frequently reported at 30% (n=72). The requirement to be named is viewed with concern as respondents have a fear of being "blacklisted" or facing "reprisal" from employers. A perception of VCI being more veterinary practitioner focused was a common theme and an issue for approximately 20% (n=48) of respondents. 10% (n=24) of those who responded in the comments want structural reform with the VCI. Suggestions included random unannounced practice inspections and increased veterinary nurse representation on VCI.

When asked if they would be comfortable approaching the VCI with a breach of legislation, 73.22% (n=175) reported that they would be afraid to approach VCI with any concerns. When asked to choose what concerns respondents had they selected the following from a provided list:

Concerns Reporting Breaches To VCI	
Lack of Anonymity or Protection	87.15% (n=156)
Fear of Retaliation or Job Loss	74.86% (n=134)
Concern for reputation	60.34% (n=108)
Fear of Not Being Believed	48.60% (n=87)
Not fully knowing what constitutes a reportable offense	37.99% (n=68)
Past negative experiences (personal or observed)	11.73% (n=21)
Other	4.47% (n=8)

When asked if they felt that the VCI effectively safeguards the interests of veterinary nurses the response was poor with only 5.76% (n=14) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement.



Respondents were then asked how the Veterinary Council of Ireland could enhance its support for veterinary nurses and ensure compliance with legislation. A variety of comments and recommendations included engaging more with veterinary nurses (27.03% (n=20)) to help raise the profile of and provide better support for nurses.

Building on this theme, more veterinary nurse representation on VCI was suggested by 14.86% (n=11). Currently only one veterinary nurse representative is elected to VCI council. Regulatory representation for the profession is not possible if a voice for the profession is not present in sufficient numbers within the council. In 2019 the Crowe Report, an independent review of the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI), evaluated the statutory body's governance structures, operations, and effectiveness under the Veterinary Practice Act 2005. It found that, with 19 members, the size of the Council is unwieldy and limits its effectiveness. The report recommended reducing VCI membership to nine or ten members, bringing it in line with contemporary best practice. The report also advised that the percentage of members elected from the veterinary profession should be reduced so that external members who are not veterinary practitioners or veterinary nurses make up the majority. They suggested that a nine-person Council, could comprise three vets, one veterinary nurse and additional external membership from areas such as accountancy, law, HR management, public affairs/policy-making, or animal welfare advocacy.

To deal with the breaches of legislation witnessed and to improve efficient reporting, 24.32% (n=18) are calling for an anonymous reporting system. This mechanism is essential given the feeling and concern of retaliation expressed in earlier questions. Breaches of legislation and animal welfare concerns will continue if a more robust, anonymous reporting system is not clearly available.

VCI stated at a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture and Food focused on Recruitment and Retention of Veterinary Nurses on July 15th 2026, that an anonymous reporting system is available. This reporting system is welcomed by the IVNA. From the survey responses it is clear that this means of reporting is unknown to the respondents. The issue is a lack of communication regarding how to report via this option. This is reiterated in the survey with 4% of survey respondents highlighting the need for more information to be made available and clearly communicated by VCI.

Upon publishing this report, the VCI website states that all complaints must include a full name, address and telephone number. A signature is also required on the application for the inquiry to proceed

Other suggestions to improve veterinary nurse support and legislation compliance in the free comment space was random inspections of veterinary premises by 10.81% (n=8) to allow for identification of breaches.

VCI have a set of practice standards that must be complied with as part of their Practice Accreditation Scheme (PAS) which requires a practice inspection when the licence is due for renewal every four years. As the PAS inspection is a planned visit there are concerns among those surveyed that any potential breaches are removed for inspection but returned afterwards. Random checks over the four years would reduce any breaches as inspections become more efficient at finding and dealing with such issues, a role veterinary nurses are more than capable of filling.

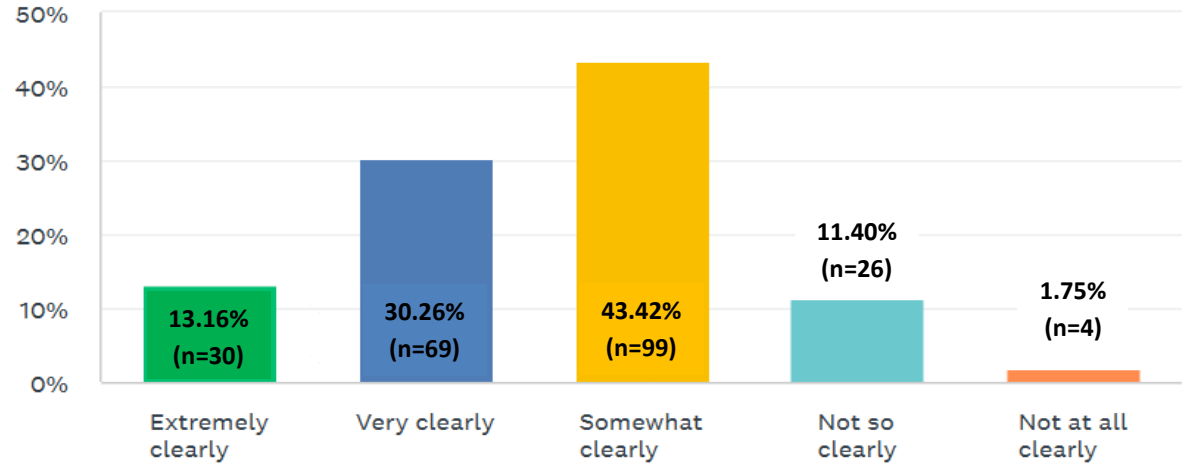
Another comment regarding VCI was the lack of correspondence when contacted by 8.11% (n=8) of those surveyed. This creates disillusionment when correspondence regarding fees is efficient but queries remain delayed or unanswered. Other suggestions made include the need for non-veterinary representatives on VCI by 4%. Again, this possibly stems from fear of retaliation if reporting any concerns as the veterinary industry remains tight knit. 4% also highlighted the issue of lay people identifying themselves as veterinary nurses and performing acts of veterinary nursing without sufficient training and knowledge leading to concerns regarding patient care and welfare and public trust. This is also something that random inspections could identify and reduce.

In line with this, respondents wanted the scope and role of the veterinary nurse increased and the skills and qualities a nurse can bring to a practice highlighted. This is in keeping with findings of the 2018 and 2023 IVNA Survey findings that reported a lack of utilisation as a major factor in nurses leaving the profession. A similar finding was highlighted in the VCI Workforce Review in 2024 where the first recommended action from the report was to raise the profile and scope of the veterinary nurse which to date remains to be followed through on.

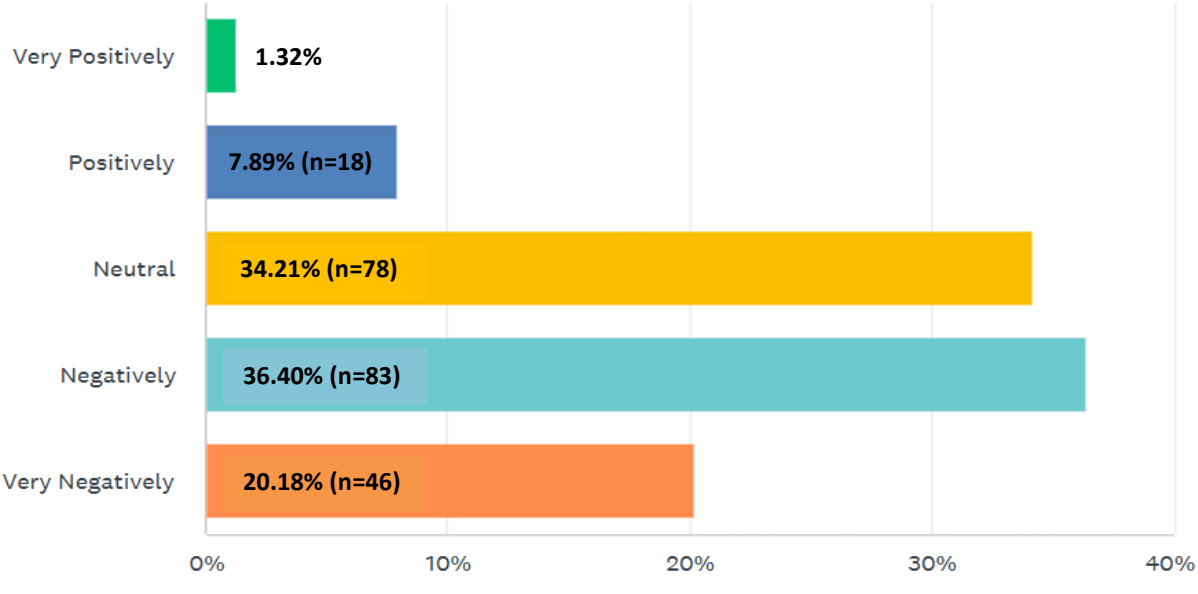
Control of Dogs (XL Bully) Legislation 2024

In 2024 new legislation was introduced making it illegal to import, breed, rehome or resell an XL bully dog. In February 2025 it became illegal to own an XL bully breed without a Certificate of Exemption. To receive certification the XL bully dog must be microchipped, neutered and licensed. A form confirming the neutering or stating they are medically unfit to be neutered must be signed by a veterinary practitioner. Initially, a lack of clarity regarding the implications for the dogs and veterinary staff was a cause of significant stress and anxiety among veterinary nurses and practitioners. To assess progress in this matter some survey questions were included.

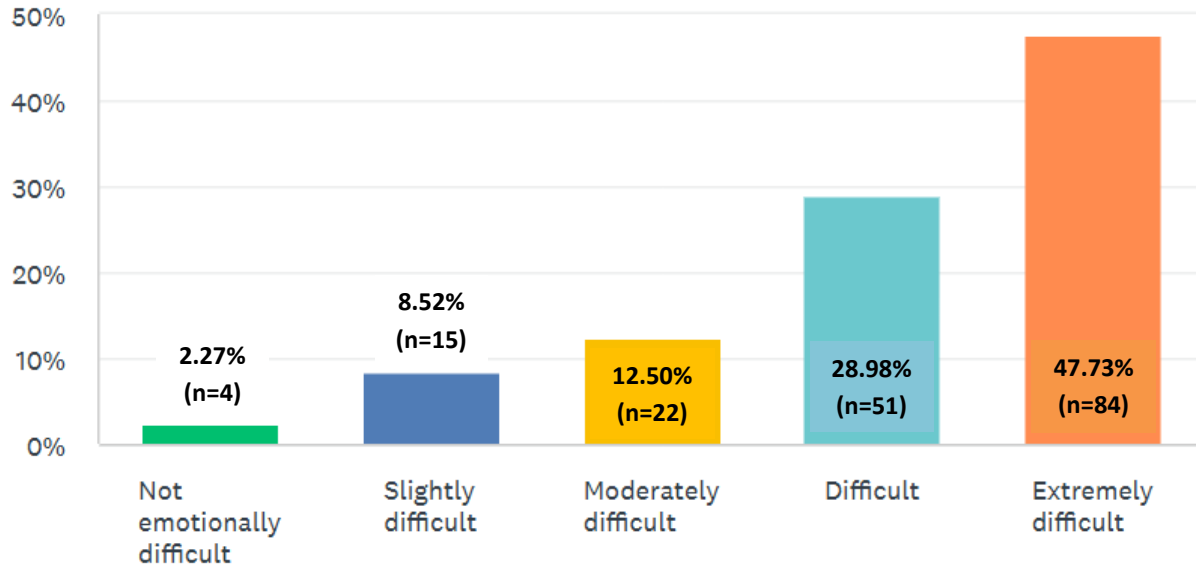
A good understanding of the specific legislation relating to XL bully dogs by veterinary nurses has been reported through the survey findings with the majority expressing a clear understanding of the legislation.



When asked what they believe the effect of the legislation has had on the welfare of the XL bully breeds, 56.58% (n=129) believe the legislation has had a negative to very negative effect on XL bully breed welfare.



When asked if they were involved in the euthanasia of a healthy XL bully breed due to compliance issues or owner concerns, unfortunately 35.40% (n=80) reported 'Yes' for this question. When asked to report on the emotional difficulties of being involved in the euthanasia of these dogs due to legislative pressure 47.73% (n=84) found it extremely difficult.

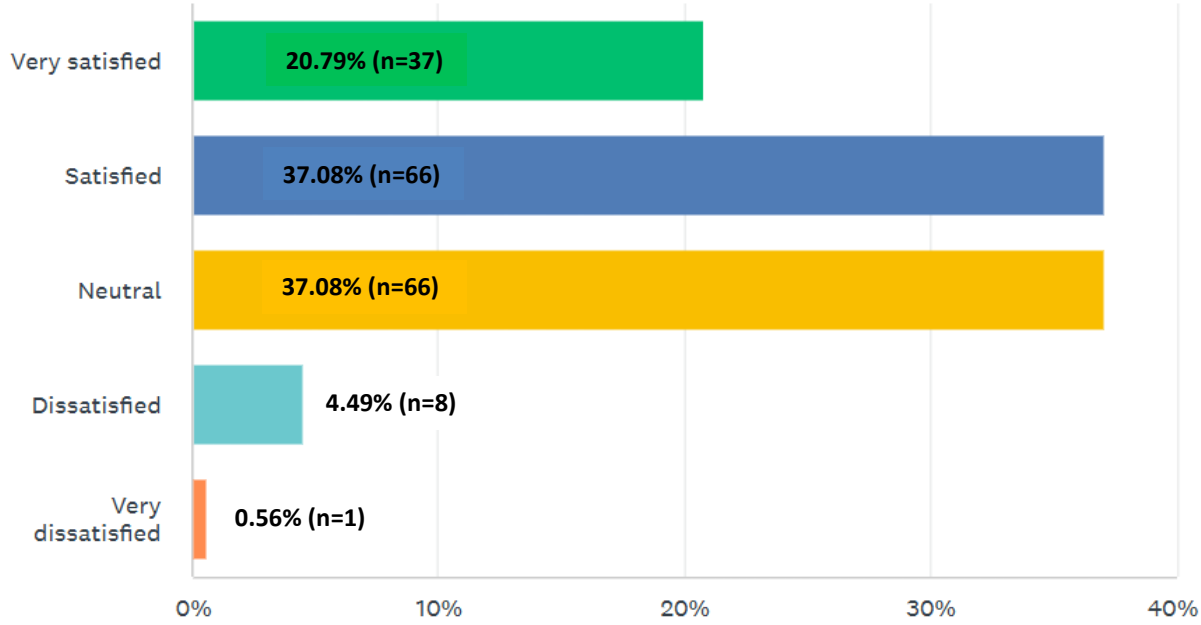


When asked to describe any experiences, concerns or suggestions in relation to this matter and the effect it has had on them, the most common comment was the need for owner education at 46.34% (n=19) with regard to this matter. Respondents also commented that owner education is essential prior to committing to owning any pet. 39.02% (n=16) of those who responded noted that being involved in any euthanasia is difficult, but the euthanasia of an otherwise healthy animal based on breed alone is devastating and emotionally draining causing a lot of stress.

Several studies and reports have identified the veterinary professions as emotionally challenging and situations such as this may contribute further to compassion fatigue, burnout and retention issues within the profession. 21.95% (n=9) mentioned a frustration with a lack of enforcement at government level with all legislation such as the dog breeding act which can also lead to welfare issues. Some also felt the XL Bully legislation was rushed.

Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA) Questions

44.70% (n=97) of those surveyed are currently members of the IVNA. 66.33% (n=132) of those who answered stated that they would be happy or very happy to recommend the IVNA to fellow nurses while 30.65% (n=61) were neutral to this question. When asked how satisfied they are with the support provided by the IVNA, 57.87% (n=103) reported being satisfied or very satisfied.



In relation to the IVNA communication channel used, the majority of respondents use social media at 70.35% (n=140). The next most popular method of interaction or communication was email at 34.17% (n=68) followed closely by webinars or events 32.66% (n=65).

Report on Respondents IVNA Perspectives and Benefits

Responses to IVNA identity-related questions reveal key themes such as; member incentives, professional support, and employment conditions. Based on analysis of 220 responses across several survey questions. The following themes have been identified.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and education was the most significant theme with 26.80% (n=59) respondents highlighting a high demand for educational resources. Suggestions included the provision of free or low-cost CPD, frequent webinars, and some in-person events in different locations around the country throughout the year. There was also strong support for the creation of a dedicated veterinary nursing publication or journal, similar to the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) journal, to showcase nursing-specific research and views. Respondents also requested practical workshops for under-utilised skills like suturing.

Currently the IVNA publishes one veterinary nursing related article per month in the Veterinary Ireland Journal, a subscription to which is included as part of membership. The IVNA provides several educational webinars annually that are free to members.

Communication, Awareness & Outreach was the next most popular theme with 15.5% (n=34) of those surveyed feeling the IVNA needs more presence throughout the year. Suggestions included more content on social media at least monthly to explain what the IVNA does. Frequent comments highlighted the need to engage with students in colleges before they graduate to ensure they understand the benefits of IVNA membership. Another suggestion was the creation of pocket guides, pamphlets for new grads, and lay-language explanations of employment legislation. Currently the IVNA visits all veterinary nurse education institutions on an annual basis. To advance on this, it is hoped that a student from each institution will be a dedicated IVNA student representative who can liaise with the IVNA Student Rep directly. Students are encouraged to attend or volunteer at the annual IVNA Congress to facilitate interaction with industry, nurses and gain additional education. In 2026, the IVNA started a monthly update newsletter to keep members informed of all activities.

Respondents are concerned about workplace conditions in areas such as breaks, staffing and hours and feel the IVNA should be assisting in this area with 14.50% (n=32) of those surveyed expressing deep concern over daily working conditions beyond just financial compensation. A major priority is protecting rest breaks and ensuring employers provide adequate breaks during long shifts. Respondents would like to see the IVNA advocate for mandated nurse-to-vet ratios and better staff coverage to prevent burnout and ensure patient care, safety and welfare is prioritised. As highlighted in previous IVNA surveys and other similar surveys, work-life balance is a significant challenge in the veterinary profession resulting in poor retention. Respondents highlighted the need for better rotation of shifts, premiums for night work, and support for working parents through job sharing or flexible hours. The IVNA continues to be available for its members and to speak on the profession's behalf. They will often host work-related webinars to inform nurses of their worker rights. In 2023, the IVNA introduced a free legal support service for its full members enabling them to avail of free legal consultations in relation to employment matters and other legal concerns.

The ongoing need for professional recognition and skill utilisation that was identified as a major cause for nurses leaving the profession in the IVNA surveys in 2018 and 2023 continues to be an issue for nurses in the current 2026 survey. Lack of utilisation results in a reduced job satisfaction and a feeling of a lack of respect. This was noted by 11.80% (n=26) with a perceived lack of respect for the registered veterinary nurse role within clinics and by the public. As highlighted several times throughout the survey results, title protection is a priority for veterinary nurses. Respondents want the IVNA to advocate for title protection to prevent unqualified individuals from posing as veterinary nurses and performing acts of veterinary nursing.

Respondents also want veterinary practitioners to be educated on the full scope of the registered veterinary nurse to encourage autonomy and the use of their advanced skills. This was also identified by the VCI Workforce Review Survey in 2024 and was their number one recommendation to highlight the scope of the veterinary nurse to veterinary practitioners which remains to be actioned.

Issues surrounding pay are also highlighted in the survey themes regarding the IVNA and the desire for nurses to receive financial value and reduced membership fees. 10.90% (n=24) highlight the severe low salary of many veterinary nurses, perceiving the cost of IVNA membership as a barrier to joining and would prefer a reduced membership fee. Suggestions in this area also include discount codes for pet shops, insurance, scrubs and similar benefits for members. Respondents would also like the IVNA to advocate for employers to cover the IVNA membership fee. Currently the IVNA has several member discounts for shops, pets, insurance companies and more. The IVNA is currently looking to increase the number of member discounts available to provide as much value as possible. The IVNA is an entirely volunteer-led organisation with committee members usually in full-time employment outside of the organisation. The IVNA receives no funding and is entirely supported by membership payments and generous company sponsorship. The organisation is very aware of the low income of its members and the profession and always aims to keep the membership rate as low as possible – currently €5 per month.

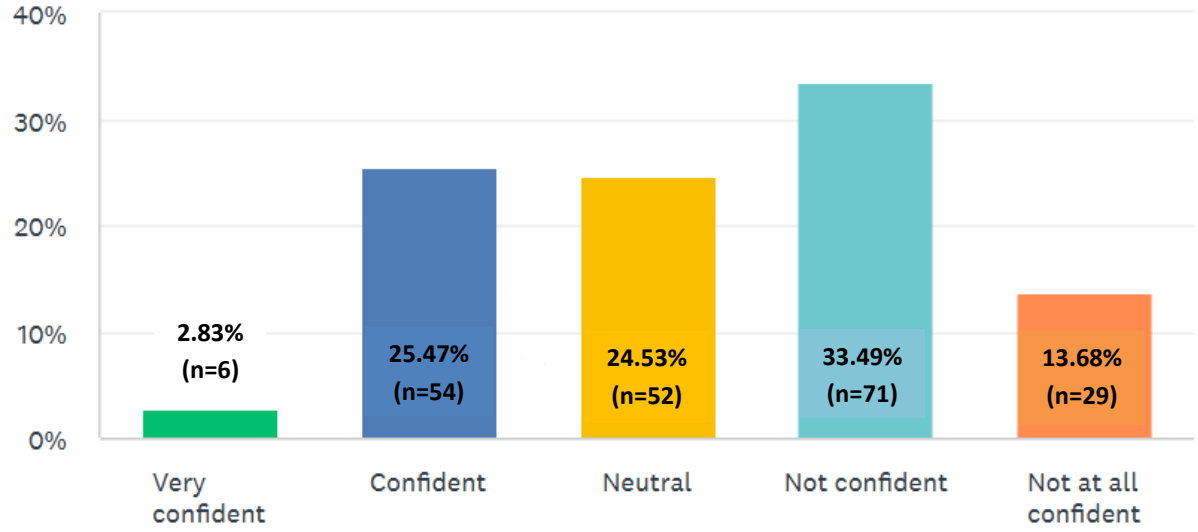
Continuing on the theme of pay, many respondents are calling for a recognised pay scale based on level of experience to ensure fairness across the profession. As discussed earlier an SEO would allow for the provision of a legal low limit of pay based on experience but would allow for payment above this minimum allowing for regional cost of living differences.

The call for unionisation is again requested as it was in the 2018 and 2023 survey. There is a consistent and vocal demand for the IVNA to initiate and support the creation of a trade union for veterinary nurses. Respondents are also seeking legal support to inform them and provide them with negotiating powers for better rights and dispute resolution. Continuing the support provision theme, suggestions were made for a mentorship or support network to help new graduate nurses navigate their first year as they transition from the educational setting and the support it provides to working in a practice setting.

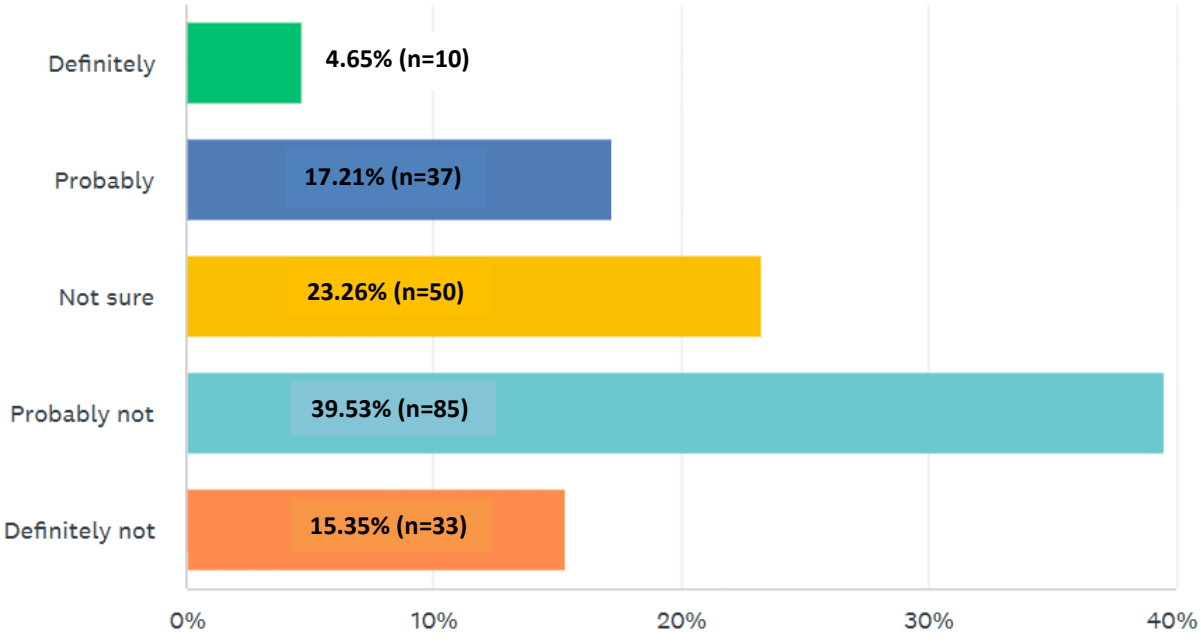
Unionisation requires investment and commitment from the entire profession. This was attempted by an IVNA sub-committee, the IVNU, who carried out tireless work meeting with trade unions and getting all requirements in place. Unfortunately, the profession did not turn up and vote on unionisation on the specific day, ballots could be done online or by proxy. Ultimately the numbers were not sufficient and unionisation was not possible. The desire for this is consistent in all surveys but the IVNA needs to represent a larger portion of the profession to speak on its behalf in this matter, so its current focus is on building membership numbers to get to this point and then revisit unionisation.

Attitudes Towards The Profession

The current survey also included several questions designed to explore veterinary nurses and student nurses' attitudes and perceptions towards their chosen profession. When asked how confident respondents were for the future of veterinary nursing in Ireland 47.17% (n=100) were not or not at all confident. 24.53% (n=52) were neutral on this question and the remaining 28.30% (n=60) felt confident about the profession's future.



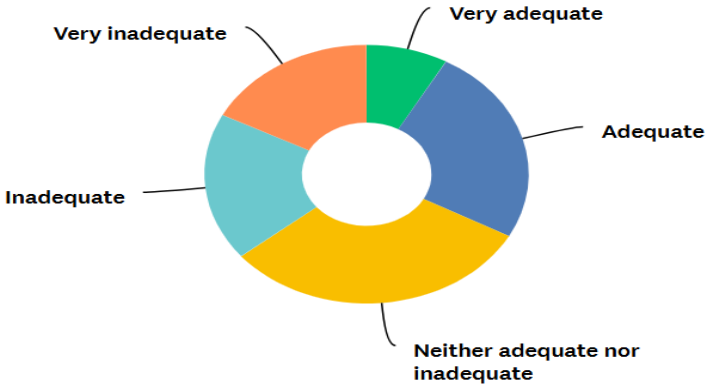
When asked if they would recommend a career in veterinary nursing to others, only 21.86% (n=47) responded positively to this question. Disappointingly, 78.14% (n=168) are unsure or would not recommend veterinary nursing as a career choice to others. Given the level of commitment required with 2-4 years of study, exams, placements and building competence in clinical skills, teamwork and communication skills it is disheartening to see such a negative response to a career that is considered a calling and requires a passion and drive for patient care, welfare and advocacy.



Health & Safety

In the 2023 survey, 55.45% of those surveyed reported having their own personal dosimeter at their practice. In the most recent 2026 survey, this number has increased with 66.42% (n=180) of those surveyed reporting that they have their own personal dosimeter. 29.52% (n=80) of respondents noted that they do not work with radiation or are no longer working in a clinical setting, so it is no longer required. Others reported in the comments of having a shared dosimeter, having one dosimeter in a shared space and not worn, or having suitable safety features such as lead-lined features negating the need for a dosimeter.

75.58% (n=270) of those surveyed responded to questions regarding manual handling training provided by the practice. 35.93% (n=97) felt the training was inadequate or very inadequate.



Concerningly 35.92% (n=97) of respondents reported experiencing a manual handling related injury during work. The most common injury reported was back injury with 50.81% (n=31) of respondents citing this. The most common cause was due to lifting large patients without assistance due to lack of staff or lack of lifting equipment. Only 8.19% (n=5) of injuries were bite related while all other injuries were joint, wear and tear or unspecified. The majority of these other injuries were reported as being as a result of lifting boxes or patients. 69.07% (n=67) of those injured reported continuing to work despite being injured. 16.50% (n=16) were absent from work for 1-7 days as a result of the injury.

When asked if the injury was formally reported to the employer, 28.28% (n=28) stated it was, 37.37% (n=37) did not formally notify their employer, while 19.19% (n=19) felt they were discouraged from formally reporting the injury.

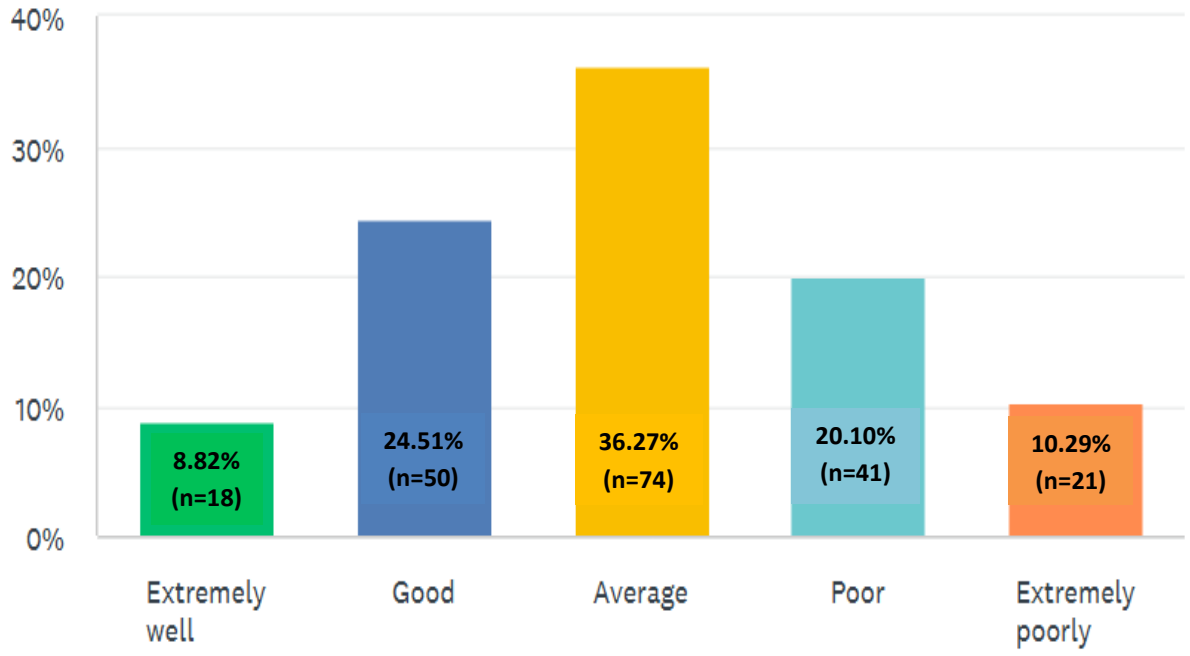
Separate to this, almost 50% (n=129) of those who answered reported being in a situation where their safety felt compromised. The issues ranged from taking radiographs without appropriate safety equipment and dosimeters, faulty anaesthetic equipment leading to anaesthetic gas exposure, lifting animals without sufficient assistance, restraining aggressive animals without adequate assistance, equipment or continuing beyond a patient's limit resulting in bites and scratches. Several reported feeling compromised while pregnant.

Aggressive Behaviour From Clients or Visitors to the Practice

A new concern was raised regarding aggressive behaviour from clients or visitors to the clinic. The survey indicates a pervasive culture of aggression directed toward veterinary staff, particularly veterinary nurses and receptionists. Of those that responded to the question, 62.28% (n=109) reported that they had experienced aggressive behaviour from clients or visitors to the clinic. The most frequent trigger for aggression was the cost of treatment with 45% (n=41) of responses relating to this. Approximately 35% (n=32) of responses stated aggressive experiences included shouting, swearing, name-calling, and "squaring up" to staff. Respondents reported that this often occurs at the reception desk or over the phone. Shockingly, 15% (n=14) of those who responded recalled extreme cases involving staff being physically assaulted (e.g. a broken nose), threatened with weapons (a gun, a hurl), or subjected to death threats. 4.5% (n=5) of respondents stated the authorities had to be called to assist with the situation and/or remove the person from the premises.

30.39% (n=62) felt that the situation was poorly or extremely poorly handled by the practice. Unfortunately, 5% (n=5) of respondents reported a lack of management support and that management "sides with the client" or rewards bad behaviour with discounts to avoid complaints. An overwhelming majority of respondents at 70% (n=63) call for a zero-tolerance policy, whereby aggressive clients are "fired" or banned from the practice immediately. Other suggestions include installing panic buttons, CCTV, and ensuring a minimum of two staff members are present at all times.

How Was The Situation Handled By The Practice



Comparative Analysis

The following qualitative comparative analysis examines the evolution of the Irish Veterinary Nursing profession over an eight-year period, drawing on the 2018, 2023, and 2026 IVNA survey results. While certain demographic constants remain, the 2026 data highlights a critical deterioration in retention and mental well-being that poses a significant threat to the long-term viability of the profession. A consistent characteristic across all three surveys is that the profession remains overwhelmingly female-dominated, at approximately 97–98%. However, the age demographic has changed:

- **2018:** 56% of respondents were under 30.
- **2023:** only 41% under 30 and 35% over the age of 35.
- **2026:** 57.41% of respondents under the age of 30.

The profession appears to have returned to a younger age profile as reflected in the 2018 survey. This returning trend coupled with the ongoing retention crisis suggests experienced nurses are exiting the profession, replaced by a constant influx of new graduates who also eventually leave.

Related to the retention crisis is the most alarming trend identified in the 2026 survey which is the collapse of long-term career confidence. While 2023 showed a slight improvement in those planning to stay in the profession, 2026 has seen those gains erased.

Career Intentions	2018 Results	2023 Results	2026 Results
Planning to Stay	53%	57.22%	24.30%
Potentially Leaving	46%	40.65%	75.70%

Shockingly in 2026, three-quarters of the workforce is either actively planning to leave, considering leaving, or unsure about their future. This is a staggering increase from the "worrying" 46% reported in 2018. As was the case in all surveys to date, pay remains the primary driver for exiting the profession, but the intensity of this concern has peaked in 2026. Regarding reasons for leaving in relation to pay, in 2018, 56% cited pay as their main reason for leaving. In the current 2026 survey, this has increased dramatically to 92.61%. The increasing cost of living is contributing to the retention issue. The 2026 report highlights the closeness of living wage currently at €15.40 per hour, and the average veterinary nurse salary of €17.40 per hour leaving very little margin for financial security.

While pay and work-life balance have been among the "top three" issues since 2018, the 2026 survey introduced new, severe stressors with 81.82% of nurses in 2026 citing burnout and mental health as a key reason for leaving the profession. This aligns with 99.43% of respondents in 2023 who described veterinary nursing work as "stressful".

Worryingly, a pervasive culture of aggression from clients has been identified in the current 2026 survey, with 62.28% of staff experiencing shouting, threats, or physical assault, primarily triggered by the cost of treatments. Encounters such as these are naturally stressful contributing further to mental health issues and burnout.

Another worrying finding in the 2026 survey is that 56.10% of respondents reported witnessing breaches of veterinary legislation, such as unregistered staff performing nursing duties. Yet, 73.22% are afraid to approach the regulator (VCI) due to a lack of anonymity and fear of retaliation. This trend of unqualified staff performing acts of veterinary nursing affects animal welfare, standards of care and has a negative impact on the public and the profession. The requirement for a robust anonymous reporting system is essential to ensure animals, clients and nurses are protected by the regulator.

One continuing positive trend is the increase in employer-funded professional costs. Payment of VCI Fees was only covered by 35% of employers in 2018. By 2023 and 2026, approximately 80% of nurses have their registration fees covered. Some aspects of radiation health and safety have improved with personal dosimeter ownership increasing from 60% in 2018 to 66.42% in 2026.

Summary of Comparative Analysis IVNA Surveys 2018 – 2026

Category	2018 Survey	2023 Survey	2026 Survey
Survey Sample Size	390 responses	334 responses	372 responses
Gender (Female)	97%	98%	95.7%
Age (Under 30)	56%	41%	57.4%
Employment Contract	66% have one	81% have one	79% have one
Average Pay	€24,000 per year	€16.90/hr (€10.58 – €22.12)	€17.50/hr (€12.40 - €35.00)
Pay Review	70% never get a review	53% receive annual review	56% received an increase in last year
Lunch Breaks	20% (1 in 5) get full break	27% take full legal break	35% unable to take adequate breaks
Overtime: Nothing Paid	35% get no compensation	27% get no compensation	13.38% get no compensation
Overtime: Time in Lieu	35%	40%	55.63%
Employer Paid VCI Fees	35%	78% (full or partial)	79% (20.8% pay own)
CPD Support	55%	73%	80% (48.58% fees & hours, 32.27% fee only)
Dosimeter Use	60% have one	55% have own one	66.42% have one
Plan to Leave	46% (within 1 year)	41% (within 5 years)	75.70% - (52.80% potentially leaving & 22.90% unsure)
Primary Reason for Leaving	Pay (56%)	Pay (51%)	Pay (92.61%)
Second Paid Job	18%	15%	Not specified

Conclusion

The comparison of these three data points unfortunately reveals a profession potentially at breaking point. While employers are increasingly covering basic professional fees, the core issues of stagnant pay, lack of structured career scales, and worsening mental health have led to a situation where 3 out of every 4 veterinary nurses potentially leaving the profession. The 2026 findings suggest that without radical interventions, such as a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) for pay and anonymous reporting systems for welfare concerns and unqualified people identifying and performing acts of veterinary nursing, the current recruitment and retention crisis will continue to escalate.