

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Survey investigating factors affecting recruitment and retention in the UK veterinary nursing profession

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## Abstract

**Background:** Recruitment and retention have been identified as contributing factors to workforce shortages in the veterinary team.

**Methods:** Results from veterinary nurses to an online questionnaire regarding recruitment and retention were analysed.

**Results:** Veterinary nurses had few job changes (median 2); however, 53.8% ( $n = 1060$ ) reported they were likely or very likely to leave their employment within 2 years. Respondents who were recently qualified ( $p < 0.001$ ) and on lower salaries ( $p < 0.001$ ) were significantly more likely to plan to leave. The most frequently chosen reasons to stay in a position were team, location and working hours, while reasons to leave were salary, management and work–life balance. Respondents most disliked ‘dealing with people’, remuneration and work–life balance and would like to change the salary, management and team aspects. Employers reported difficulty in employing an experienced veterinary nurse.

**Limitations:** A questionnaire simplifies the nature of retention. Also, a comparatively low number of responses was received, with overrepresentation of some groups. It was conducted in 2018; however, it still provides a useful comparison for studies regarding recent world events.

**Conclusion:** The shortage of veterinary nurses is due in part to the lack of retention within the profession. Adequate recompense for work undertaken and value attributed to the role are suggested as contributing factors.

## INTRODUCTION

The ‘VN Futures’ project was initiated in October 2015 to address ongoing challenges in the veterinary nursing profession and to create a desirable and viable career.<sup>1</sup> It considered difficulties in recruiting Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs) to be a key issue and focused on recruitment, retention and returners with an aim to address these challenges over a 5-year period.<sup>1</sup> Despite a record 20,000 RVNs registered in July 2021, recruitment and retention issues continue to remain a problem.<sup>2</sup>

Staff shortages have been exacerbated by the global pandemic and the UK exit from the European Union. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) held a major summit in November 2021 to address this issue;<sup>3</sup> however, this is not the first time that a shortage has been acknowledged. In 2018, the RCVS asked

that veterinary nurses (VNs) be added to the Shortage Occupation List, after finding a 7.6% shortage in the UK.<sup>4</sup> This has yet to be actioned, with only veterinarians currently on this list.<sup>5</sup>

The 2019 RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession,<sup>6</sup> demonstrated that nearly a quarter of respondents (24.8%) were planning to leave the veterinary nursing profession (for non-retirement reasons) in the next 5 years, an increase from 15.4% in 2014.<sup>7</sup>

Pay and not feeling rewarded or valued (non-financial) were cited as the top two reasons to leave, which has remained stagnant since 2010.<sup>7,8</sup> In 2014, the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons Salary Survey found that full-time VNs received a median annual salary of £20,229.<sup>9</sup> In 2020, it had risen to £25,034.<sup>10</sup> Although there has been a yearly increase in income, veterinary nursing salaries have remained over £6000 below the national UK average, according

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to the Office for National Statistics.<sup>11,12</sup> VNs with leadership or management roles may see a higher median annual salary of £27,718,<sup>10</sup> but this is still nearly £4000 under the national average.

Pay and not feeling rewarded or valued may be related. VNs may not be used to their full advantage as revenue generators for practices,<sup>13</sup> including not charging for nursing clinics.<sup>14</sup> In addition, their names are left off veterinary invoices,<sup>15</sup> which may leave VNs as unrecognised parts of patient care and practice income. The RCVS Schedule 3 survey reported that VNs and veterinary surgeons wanted more clarity around Schedule 3; in addition, it highlighted the feelings of VNs being underutilised and undervalued,<sup>16</sup> which may be linked concepts.

The results of the aforementioned VN Futures project<sup>1</sup> and RCVS survey<sup>6</sup> highlight that aspects of recruitment and retention are problems in the veterinary nursing profession. This study complements these projects by considering movements within, as well as away from, the profession and the opinions of employers. It forms the second part of a larger study investigating recruitment and retention in the veterinary professions.<sup>17</sup>

This article's aims are to report and interpret the findings of the survey which explored the following questions:

- How likely are VNs to be looking for new employment, and how often do they change jobs?
- What demographic factors affect the likelihood of being looking for a change in current employment or profession?
- What are the main reasons to stay at or leave a position?
- Into which fields are VNs considering moving?
- How easily are employers able to recruit VNs?

## METHOD

### The questionnaire

These methods have been previously presented in the *Veterinary Record* in the first report in this series regarding veterinary surgeons.<sup>17</sup>

The online questionnaire was created using Surveygizmo (surveygizmo.com). It consisted of closed ( $n = 57$ ) and open questions ( $n = 7$ ; plus nine options to clarify closed answers) within three sections: 'current employment', 'about you' and 'you as an employer' (see [Supporting Information](#)). Participants were able to skip questions. The survey was launched on 13 September 2018 and closed on 31 October 2018. It was open to any veterinary surgeon or VN working in the UK; this article presents the responses from VNs. While VNs may have qualified overseas, only data pertaining to those practising in the UK were included. The new Supplementary Charter in 2015 recognised VNs as a profession and provided a coherent register of RVNs.<sup>18</sup> However, the title VN is not protected, and can therefore be used by an unregistered and unquali-

fied layperson.<sup>19</sup> In this questionnaire, the distinction between RVN, student VN and VN was not specified, so the general term VN has been used throughout this paper. RVN is used in cited sources where the title was specified.

The questionnaire was distributed via social media, for example, British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) and British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) channels, Vets StayGoDiversify and Vets Voices, and by email through project team contacts at the BSAVA and BEVA through their membership databases. No incentives were offered.

## Data analysis

Responses were analysed using Microsoft Excel and Graphpad Prism 9. Descriptive statistics were performed, with Spearman's correlation used to compare two demographics (length of time qualified and salary) with one question that exemplifies the recruitment and retention issues: 'likeliness to be looking for a new job in the next 2 years'.

Quantitative content analysis was performed on open text responses and for the 'other' options where offered. An iterative inductive and deductive approach was used. First, author Jennifer R. Hagen read the responses, and the data were coded to identify meaning. During this inductive process, similarities were noted with the first report in this series, which reported veterinary surgeon data.<sup>17</sup> The veterinary categories were therefore used deductively, whereby similar codes within the VN data were grouped into these pre-existing categories. Coded data that did not fit into a veterinary category were inductively classified as a new category. These new categories are specifically mentioned in this report. Where responses to 'other, please specify' questions were very similar to pre-provided tick box options, these were coded into the established categories. The percentages of respondents whose data were coded into each category are reported.

## RESULTS

### Demographics

In total, 1075 responses from VNs were analysed. Of these, 267 completed the 'you as an employer' section. It is not possible to accurately state how many respondents were RVNs compared to those who classed themselves as a 'veterinary nurse' and therefore chose to participate.

Personal demographics, work context and work pattern of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

### Likelihood of looking for a new position

Respondents were asked to rate how likely they were to be looking for a new job in the next 2 years on a scale of 'very likely', 'likely', 'unlikely', 'very unlikely' or

**TABLE 1** Demographics of respondents

	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Salary ( <i>n</i> = 1060)			Gender ( <i>n</i> = 1075)		
<£25k	721	68.0	Female	1045	97.2
£25–35k	290	27.4	Male	25	2.3
£36–55k	36	3.4	Prefer not to say	4	0.4
£56–75k	9	0.8	Gender fluid	1	0.1
£76–100k	1	0.1			
>£100k	3	0.3			
Age ( <i>n</i> = 1069)			Country of qualification ( <i>n</i> = 1075)		
<25	188	17.6	UK	1027	98.7
26–35	480	44.9	Non-UK	14	1.3
36–45	295	27.6			
46–55	85	8.0			
56–65	20	6.5			
>65	1	0.1			
Nature of current job ( <i>n</i> = 1061)			Work environment ( <i>n</i> = 1061)		
Clinical practice	982	92.6	Clinical practice, first opinion	819	77.2
Other	30	2.8	Clinical practice, referrals	144	13.6
Teaching	27	2.5	Other	68	6.4
Administration	20	1.9	Academia	26	2.5
Research	2	1.2	Government veterinary service	2	0.2
			Research institution	2	0.2
Predominant species ( <i>n</i> = 1061)			Employment system ( <i>n</i> = 959)		
Small animal	959	90.4	Corporate	680	70.9
Mixed	50	4.7	Non-corporate	279	29.1
Equine	27	2.5			
Not applicable	13	1.2			
Other	10	0.9			
Farm animal	2	0.2			
Working hours ( <i>n</i> = 1055)			Out-of-hours (OOH) rota ( <i>n</i> = 951)		
<20	65	6.2	I do not do OOH	422	45.5
21–40	748	70.9	Both	304	32.0
41–60	235	22.3	Weekends	179	18.8
>60	7	0.7	Weeknights	35	3.7

‘not sure’. Over half, 53.8% (*n* = 1060), responded that it was likely or very likely that they would be looking for a new job, while 105 (9.9%) were not sure.

The median career length was 8 years (interquartile range [IQR] 11 years). Within their careers, respondents had changed employers between 0 and 15 times, median 2 (IQR 3). The shortest duration in years of employment was less than 1 year (median 1, IQR 3 years), and 73.7% had jobs lasting less than 2 years within their career.

## Demographic factors affecting likelihood of looking for a job

The ‘not sure’ respondents regarding likelihood of looking for a new job were removed to leave a scale, and the results were compared between length of time graduated and salaries.

There was a significant positive correlation between an increased number of years since respondents received their veterinary nursing training and

decreasing likelihood of looking for a new job in 2 years ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). A significant positive correlation was seen between increasing salary bracket and decreasing likelihood of looking for a new job ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ).

## Reasons to stay or leave a position

VNs planning to stay in their position were asked to choose the three most important reasons. Twenty options were provided, plus an 'other, please specify' category. Only participants who selected three answers were included in analysis (total respondents = 258). The three most frequent responses were team (59.3%), location (48.8%) and working hours (34.1%).

A similar question was posed to those planning to leave their position (total respondents = 288). The three most frequently reported important reasons for leaving were salary (56.3%), management (41.7%) and work-life balance (40.3%).

## Most disliked aspects of the profession

Participants were asked to identify one thing they dislike most about being in the profession. Content analysis of the 1043 respondents showed that many responses included several aspects, incorporating up to four codes. The most frequent category was 'dealing with people' (36.8%), which included mostly client-specific codes, such as feeling undervalued, negative public perceptions, dealing with complaints and coping with unrealistic expectations. Examples included 'Being undervalued and verbally abused by clients on a regular basis both face-to-face and on social media etc.' and 'Perception of the veterinary profession being too expensive and that we are just after money'. Remuneration, in terms of low pay, was second (24.2%). Work-life balance was the third most frequent category, including out-of-hours working and overtime expectations (10.5%) (also see [Supporting Information](#)).

When asked what one thing they would change about their current job, content analysis of the 950 respondents identified the three most frequent categories as salary (28.9%), management (17.4%) and more team support (16.4%). Salary included responses of benefits and continuing professional development allowance, for example, 'better maternity package'. Management included responses of autonomy, organisation, communication and unrealistic expectations, for example, 'use their nurses to their full potential'. More team support included responses of understaffed, workload, less administrative work and experienced staff, for example, 'more staff'. As described, responses were categorised under the labels created within the veterinary surgeon project<sup>17</sup>; however, the original sub-category 'skill development', representing 1.70% of veterinary surgeon responses, was now developed as a category of its own (sixth largest—4.3%) (also see [Supporting Information](#)).

## New fields of work

Participants were asked about their potential plans upon leaving their current position (total responses = 659). A number were considering leaving the veterinary field (13.7%) or taking a break (5.8%), giving a total 19.5% leaving the profession. However, most respondents were looking to do the same type of work but with a different employer (59.6%) or different work in the veterinary field (20.9%).

Quantitative content analysis of 127 comments identified that, for those looking for different work in the veterinary field, the most frequent categories were entering teaching (e.g., lecturing) (mentioned by 15.7%) and entering management (e.g., practice management, operations manager) (mentioned by 12.6%). Some participants (9.4%) were unsure, which was a new category compared to the veterinary surgeon results<sup>16</sup> (also see [Supporting Information](#)).

Of those looking to leave the veterinary field (86 comments), 53.5% were unsure what they wanted to do, while others were looking at moving into new occupations, including human medicine, office work, retail and childcare. Respondents wanting to take a break (36 comments) were interested in spending more time with their family (52.8.0%) and travelling (27.8%). The remaining respondents were disparate and could be classified as 'other'.

## Restarting careers

Respondents were asked if they would become VNs again. The modal category was 'maybe' (41.9%) (Figure 1).

Quantitative content analysis of the 565 comments from those who would want to start their career again suggests that the largest group (26.5%) were unsure of what profession they would choose. The specific routes mentioned included: human medicine (23.5%), scientists (8.8%), continuing to work with animals (7.8%)—promoted to a category from individual codes for this question<sup>17</sup> (e.g., veterinary surgeon, dog trainer), teaching (6.0%) and accounting (2.5%). The remaining divergent responses could be collated as 'other'.

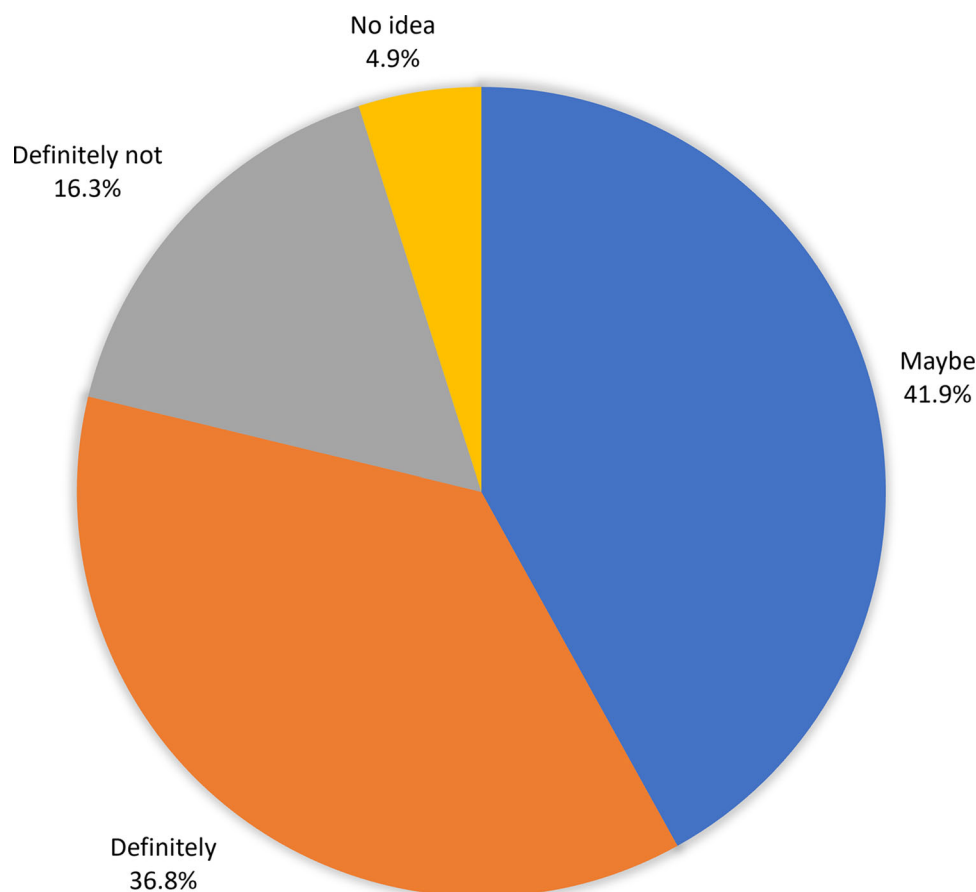
## Ease of recruitment

Employers took between less than 1 month and 2 years to recruit a VN (median 3 months, IQR 4 months). Figure 2 demonstrates the distribution of responses (the '12+' category ranged from 12 to 24 months, mean 14.4 months).

The number of applicants per position was 1–100; however, over half of employers (69.0%) only had one to three applicants apply for their last open VN position with a median of 2 (IQR = 2).

When employers were asked to rate the difficulty in recruiting VNs, 91.6% rated experienced VNs 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to recruit, whereas 36.0%





**FIGURE 1** Responses to the question 'would you become a veterinary nurse again'

rated trainee VNs as 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to recruit.

## DISCUSSION

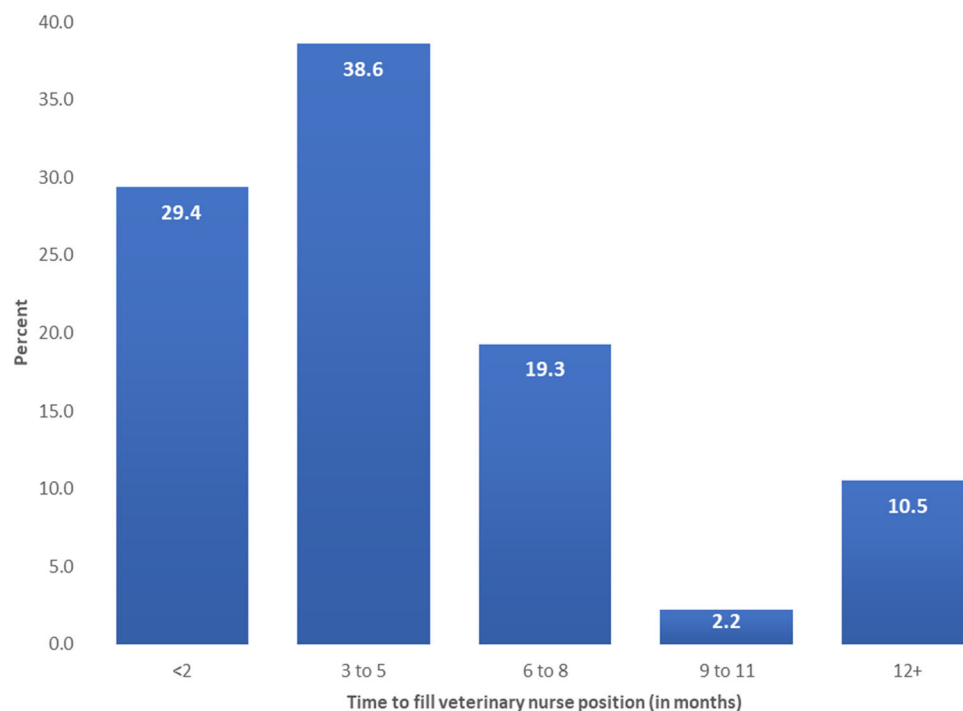
This article reported on the second part of a project investigating recruitment and retention in the veterinary professions<sup>17</sup> by analysing the VNs' responses. Overall, results were similar to the recent RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession<sup>6</sup>; however, this survey adds to this and others via its consideration of movement within the profession and its incorporation of both employee and employer views. The results were also similar to those of a previous survey of veterinary surgeons,<sup>17</sup> with few additional categories being created during the content analysis. The similarities and differences are explored below.

Employers of veterinary surgeons in the previous survey<sup>17</sup> and VNs in the current study took similar lengths of time to recruit to fill vacant positions; veterinary surgeon positions were filled in a median of 4 months, and VNs were filled in a median of 3 months. However, a number of employers reported longer times than this, with, for example, 10.5% requiring over 12 months. In addition, 69.0% of practices only had one to three applicants for their last open position; therefore, it may be difficult for the right

combination of employee and employer to find each other.

This was further supported by employers who found it challenging to hire experienced VNs (91.6% found it difficult/very difficult), slightly more difficult than reported for veterinary surgeons (91.4%),<sup>16</sup> as well as the reduced likelihood of VNs with experience leaving a position and therefore being available for hire, as identified in this study. This population suggests that it is easier to hire a trainee VN than an experienced VN; however, due to the differences in educational route of VNs in the UK, it is difficult to unpack this result further, and more research is needed regarding employment of early career VNs.

Compared to veterinary surgeons,<sup>17</sup> VNs changed employers fewer times (0–15, median 2; compared to 0–30, median 3), which might suggest that experienced VNs are quicker to leave the profession than find a new position within it. Retention of VNs in the profession has been identified as a challenge in previous studies, including the RCVS 2019 Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, which demonstrated that the most likely group to leave in the next 5 years were respondents in their 30s.<sup>6</sup> One explanation might be that VNs in their 30s feel that they have progressed as much as they are able to in practice and desire a new challenge.<sup>20</sup> Another could be that this is a point when burnout is frequently reached for VNs.<sup>21</sup> Responses to the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, in



**FIGURE 2** Employers' responses ( $n = 228$ ) to the survey question regarding time to fill a job position. The modal length of time to fill a job position was 3 to 5 months

the 2019 Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, showed that VNs had lower wellbeing scores (46.2)<sup>6</sup> than the national average for women (49.6).<sup>22</sup> Those planning to leave in the next 5 years had an even lower score (42.3).<sup>6</sup>

This survey identified that the number of VNs planning to leave the profession in the near future was 53.8%. VNs were largely unsure of what profession they would choose if they were to start over again (26.5%). The second most cited response was human medicine (23.5%), which was the top response for veterinary surgeons (39.05%), suggesting that 'it may not be the medical or scientific nature of the work content itself affecting veterinary surgeons'<sup>17</sup> or VNs.

Veterinary nursing students have been shown to be motivated to join the profession to work with animals<sup>23</sup>; therefore, it is perhaps understandable that the most frequent responses regarding the factor that VNs most dislike about their job was 'dealing with people', although this mostly related to being undervalued. Leaving the profession due to a lack of value is supported by the RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession (59.8% of respondents); however, client relationships were also identified as the sixth best thing (22.6% of respondents) about working in the profession.<sup>6</sup> VNs also noted that more respect or recognition from the public could improve job satisfaction and reported that client expectations and demands were some of the biggest challenges.<sup>6</sup>

This contradiction builds on the nuances of the issue. From this study, it appears that, again, the VN profession enjoys working with the public, but do not like the way that the profession is recognised by those utilising its services. This lack of value and recognition creates opportunities for the public to have a negative or incorrect perception of the role, mismatching the

value of the VN to the services they can provide. This may create unrealistic expectations that can lead to disrespectful behaviour and complaints, overall creating a feeling of underappreciation. Additionally, VNs can be invisible to clients due to the technical aspects of their role remaining out of view of the client or due to lack of financial recognition that comes from free nurse clinics and veterinary invoices attributed entirely to the veterinary surgeon.<sup>15</sup>

This aspect needs serious consideration by the profession as over the last few years the trend in the reporting of client relationships being a positive part of the role has declined (24.5% in 2014<sup>7</sup> to 22.6% in 2019<sup>6</sup>).

Feeling undervalued was also reported as an issue with coworkers; this may be due in part to inappropriate delegation and underutilisation from confusion regarding provisions under Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act, which was reported in a previous survey.<sup>16</sup> Historically, veterinary surgeons were held accountable for both theirs and the VNs' actions; subsequently, now that VNs are recognised as a profession by the RCVS, all individuals on the VN Register are accountable for their own actions.<sup>18</sup> However, veterinary surgeons' understanding of these changes, and the resulting delegation, has received little research to date. In human-centred nursing, it is noted that being a female-dominated profession whose primary role is built upon a model of care can lead to patriarchal misconceptions leading to underutilisation and a lack of value as an equal professional.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of being valued by coworkers is further emphasised within the current study. The practice team was the most frequently cited reason for staying in a position, and good relationships with colleagues have been shown to increase job

satisfaction in many professions, such as human nursing.<sup>25</sup> Within the 'dealing with people' category, there were also comments relating to teamwork within veterinary practice as the factor participants most dislike. A good team is clearly important, and this may support developments in interprofessional education between veterinary surgeons and VNs.<sup>26</sup>

Management was a key reason to leave for this VN population (41.7%) and veterinary surgeons (39.6%),<sup>17</sup> as well as being identified as an aspect of work that a respondent would most like to change. The veterinary team is not alone in having management challenges. In human nursing, lack of supervisor support was associated with diminishing health and wellbeing,<sup>27</sup> and a good supervisor relationship was an influence to stay in the profession.<sup>28</sup>

The second and third most frequently cited reasons to stay, after team, were location and working hours. Previous research has shown that longer commuting times are associated with negative health effects,<sup>29</sup> decreased job satisfaction and increased employee turnover.<sup>30</sup> A study focusing on healthcare workers found that increased commuting time and working overtime were associated with intention to leave.<sup>31</sup> These two factors, along with work-life balance, which was found in this study to be a key reason to leave and the third most disliked aspect of the profession, suggest that VNs are striving for appropriate non-work-related time.

Poor work-life balance could also be associated with the high number of women in the profession. This survey's respondents were 97.2% female. The VN Futures Project noted that VNs returning to full-time work after maternity leave were a focus for study.<sup>1</sup> In the 2019 Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession, it was found that part-time work has been increasing since 2010, with 58.7% of professionals working part-time having dependent children.<sup>6</sup> The veterinary profession as a whole needs to continue to ensure that workplaces remain favourable to return to, to enhance retention of experienced members of the team. Further research is required to identify the kind of support those returning from maternity leave may need to continue this positive trend.

Salary was a consistent issue found throughout this population. It was the most cited reason to leave a position (56.3% of respondents), the most cited thing a VN would like to change about their current position (28.9%) and the second most disliked aspect of the profession ('remuneration', 24.2%). This was supported by the result that the likelihood of looking for a new job within 2 years decreased with increasing salary. Salary progression is limited for VNs; within general practice, nurses can earn a median salary of £21,663 with a level six qualification up to a median £28,995 in a management position.<sup>10</sup> In this survey, 68.0% of respondents earned £25,000 or less, which might indicate that these management positions are either limited or undesirable to many professionals. Improved salary progression has been associated with improved retention in human nursing.<sup>32</sup> It is challenging to compare a publicly funded profession

with the private model of veterinary practice; however, National Health Service nurses are estimated to earn £33–35,000 annually,<sup>33</sup> and they are also offered the opportunity to progress to higher salaries up to £104,927 with experience and further qualifications.<sup>34</sup> With limitations in salary progression, dated legislation that prevents nurses undertaking any additional tasks despite additional qualifications/specialisation and increasing tuition,<sup>35</sup> further qualifications for VNs might be unprofitable or impractical, creating a ceiling for experienced VNs.

These findings highlight additional areas for future research. It is likely that there are contextual factors that are not fully understood, such as job type and location, which may make it more challenging for some employers to recruit than others. Further research into management, including VNs in management positions, might be beneficial in understanding the overall negativity towards management. How VNs utilise their degrees outside general practice, such as in education and research, and surveying VNs who have already left the profession to determine where they are going outside general practice would also be valuable, as would continuing research on the requirements of the profession including maternity leave and developing good work-life balance. In addition, given the time this survey was completed, a further study in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic would allow the opportunity to assess how attitudes may have changed.

This study has several limitations, in light of which the conclusions should be interpreted cautiously. The number of responses from VNs was lower than some organisational surveys, including the Survey of the Professions,<sup>6</sup> and represents less than 7% of UK-practising RVNs with UK addresses, given that not all respondents are likely to be RVNs.<sup>36</sup> However, the demographics of respondents (gender and age) reflected the population of VNs in practice,<sup>36</sup> and this research adds further detail to the issues of recruitment and retention. The nature of survey distribution is likely to have affected how many, and which, VNs responded. The questionnaire was created as a joint veterinary surgeon and VN survey, but advertisement utilised veterinary associations and general social media and failed to harness the reach and expertise of VN organisations. This may explain in part, for example, the overrepresentation of corporate employees (70.9%) in comparison to other reports (e.g., 48.6%).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, care should be taken when generalising to all UK VNs, and further research would be valuable in updating the results in light of recent world events as well as using targeted recruitment strategies, assistance from VN associations and incorporating differentiations between definitions of 'veterinary nurse'. The survey made use of open questions to explore participants' views; however, it relied on many closed questions, which may limit the ability to unpack the complex and intertwined issues of recruitment and retention and participants' feelings, which should also be researched using qualitative approaches such as focus groups.

The results from this population suggest that although practices can recruit trainee VNs with relative ease, it is difficult to recruit experienced VNs. In addition, it is difficult to retain VNs within a position or the profession due to issues with salary, poor management and work–life balance. These challenges may make veterinary nursing a less appealing profession to join or remain within, and suggest that future research is required to determine how to best support, utilise and develop the profession. This survey was not able to explore the optimum next steps for enabling changes to overcome the aforementioned challenges; however, the authors strongly support the work by associations such as British Veterinary Nursing Association to drive the profession forward towards the recognition it deserves and the support it requires. It is hoped that this manuscript will provide encouragement for further research on the recruitment and retention of VNs, while also providing a useful baseline of data for the time period in which it was conducted by highlighting some of the issues that are most important to our participants, namely salary, poor management and work–life balance. VNs are animal advocates, caring for their patients every day, and we should heighten our efforts to return this care to ourselves and our profession.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jennifer R. Hagen undertook all data analysis, drafted the manuscript, and reviewed and edited the final manuscript. Renate Weller developed the initial project aim, created the questionnaire, aided in distribution, and reviewed and edited the manuscript. Tim S. Mair developed the initial project aim, aided in distribution, and reviewed and edited the manuscript. Sarah Batt-Williams provided vital insights as a RVN throughout the data analysis and reviewed and edited the manuscript. Tierney Kinnison created the questionnaire, guided Jennifer Hagen in data analysis and reviewed and edited the manuscript.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was approved by the Royal Veterinary College's Social Sciences Research Ethical Review Board (SR2018-1650).

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting this paper are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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