It’s as if nothing has changed in 20 years

A report has been released by an influential team of workforce experts that reveals the majority of nurses believe staffing levels are inadequate and one in three is dissatisfied with the level of care they can provide to patients. Most nurses say they are not well paid for the job they do or the level of responsibility they have.

STAFF ARE BEING HIT WITH JOB LOSSES, A TWO-YEAR PAY FREEZE AND BUDGET CUTS

Nearly half feel they could be paid more for less effort if they worked in a different profession. Among the other grumbles were that too much time is spent on non-nursing tasks and working excess hours has become an inevitable part of the job.

Feel like you have heard it all before? Well some of you may have done, for the paragraphs above are an extract from a Nursing Standard editorial published in October 1992. It is as if nothing has moved on at all in the intervening 20 years.

This week nursing unions published their evidence to the NHS pay review body (RB), in which they make their case for nurses to receive a pay rise that reflects the hard work and commitment of all NHS staff.

Their case is the same as it was two decades ago: nurses and others in the health service are struggling under the burden of increased workloads and stress, with a third very seriously considering leaving their job. Staff are currently being hit with job losses, a two-year pay freeze and budget cuts.

Many are now working unpaid overtime to fill the gaps in service provision that government cuts are causing. All eerily familiar.

The RB made its deliberations 20 years ago against a backdrop of falling nurse numbers – down 5 per cent in two years – prompting unions to warn of a ‘recruitment crisis down the road’. That did not stop managers demanding an ‘exceptionally modest increase’ in nurses’ pay.

The 1992 editorial closed as follows: ‘The RB’s recommendations and the government’s response will have a great bearing on the barometer of nurses’ feelings. At a time when many face uncertainties about their future, with staff shortages, increased workloads and unemployment taking their toll, nurses need a morale boost as never before. I couldn’t have put it better myself.

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What do you think? Air your views on Nursing Standard and @NScomment