



Royal College
of Nursing
Scotland

**RCN Scotland's response to the Scottish Government
consultation on the**

A Rural Delivery Plan

17 March 2025

Introduction

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world's largest nursing union and professional body. It is the leading national and international authority in representing the nursing profession. We represent over half a million nurses, student nurses, midwives, nursing associates and nursing support workers in the UK and internationally.

The RCN has approximately 52,000 members in Scotland. We campaign on issues of concern to nursing staff and patients, influence health policy development and implementation, and promote excellence in nursing practice.

Background

The Scottish Government is committed to publishing a plan setting out how it is delivering for Scotland's rural communities, by the end of the current Parliament. The Rural Delivery Plan will act as a framework to consider the full breadth of policy delivery in the rural space; it will cover a range of key areas, including transport, housing, digital connectivity and health and social care. RCN Scotland has members working in health and social care across rural parts of Scotland who face their own unique challenges.

Consultation questions and RCN Scotland responses

RCN Scotland didn't respond to every question in the online survey. Below is a list of the questions we submitted an answer to.

Draft vision for rural Scotland:

"Our vision is for a vibrant, sustainable, equal and inclusive rural Scotland, with its diverse rural communities thriving across economic, cultural, social and environmental dimensions, feeding, powering, inspiring, providing homes and livelihoods to, and nurturing the wellbeing of current and future generations"

Do you agree with the proposed vision for rural Scotland?

RCN Scotland response:

Agree with the vision, though suggest the final part would be better if it read "and improving the health and wellbeing of current and future generations."

Proposed Strategic Objective:

"To support and promote an inclusive, innovative, productive, and sustainable wellbeing rural economy, providing direct benefits for local communities, revitalising them through the growth of the green economy, and delivering robust and inclusive access to digital infrastructure and services across rural Scotland."

Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for economy and digital connectivity?

RCN Scotland response:

Yes.

A lack of digital connectivity is not only an important objective in terms of economic growth, it is a barrier to the delivery of public services.

Poor internet and mobile signal is a significant concern reported by RCN members working in rural areas. Digital infrastructure is increasingly important for community nursing teams, including district nurses and health visitors. While some progress has clearly been made in harnessing the power of technology to deliver more accessible care in remote and rural

areas, there is still a long way to go. Backfill, training and support needs to be properly planned for community nurses in remote and rural areas to be able to develop the skills necessary to use technology and promote telehealth and telecare in the community. In addition to ensuring digital resources and training for NHS staff, the strategy should also consider how access to these tools can be increased for staff working in independent health and social care services

Proposed Strategic Objective:

"To support sustainable local communities by addressing population challenges in rural Scotland, to equip people with the skills, resources and education to develop a highly valued and adaptive workforce, and to ensure that workforce is supported to work through high quality, accessible and affordable childcare across rural Scotland."

Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for population, education and skills?

RCN Scotland response:

Yes.

In terms of nursing, some nursing staff in rural areas may feel professionally isolated and there needs to be a focus on their continuous learning and development. It should also be recognised that many services provided within remote and rural areas are nurse led which results in a need for increased clinical responsibility. However, this is often not supported by sufficient professional development or training opportunities and the strategy should seek to improve this.

Like the wider population, and as a predominately female profession which therefore has significant caring responsibilities, an inability to secure childcare which works for shift work is a significant barrier to recruitment of nursing staff in remote and rural areas.

Proposed Strategic Objective:

"To improve access to high quality affordable and market housing to enable the people of rural Scotland to live, work and thrive."

Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for housing?

RCN Scotland response:

Yes.

Again, nursing staff faces similar challenges to the wider population in terms of access to

affordable housing. This impacts on health and social care providers' ability to recruit and retain nursing staff and therefore also affects the delivery of services and the ability to meet the strategic objective for health and social care.

This is also specifically an issue for nursing students. In 2023, RCN Scotland surveyed our student members and published 'Nursing [Student Finance, the true cost of becoming a nurse.](#)' This report found that nursing students across Scotland are facing serious financial pressures; 66% have considered dropping out of their course due to financial concerns and 57% of these students who considered dropping out reported this was due to the cost of getting to placements. Some of the students studying in rural and remote areas highlighted the high accommodation costs they face to attend their clinical placement. For example, at a roundtable we held following publication of the report, one of our student committee members described how she'd been forced to pull out of a clinical placement on Skye, which she feels would have been very valuable to her development, due to prohibitively high accommodation costs.

Proposed Strategic Objective:

"To build on access to robust health and social care across rural Scotland and improve the health and wellbeing of those in our rural communities."

Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for health and social care?

RCN Scotland response:

The wording of this strategic objective suggests that "robust" health and social care" services already exist in rural communities. In respect of certain services, RCN Scotland would dispute this claim. Access to palliative care, other specialist care, maternity services and adult care home places is patchy in rural parts of Scotland, for example. We would suggest that, rather than down play these challenges, the objective would be better if it read "To improve access to..." This would also bring this objective in line with the wording of others.

As with all the objectives, determining whether the strategic objective is being met will require the identification and recording of specific data indicators, as well as the establishment of a benchmark. In respect of measuring access to health and social care services in rural areas, significant challenges remain. There is a significant gap in our understanding of unmet need across Scotland, but particularly in rural areas. In terms of social care, access to data is made more complicated by the complexity of provision. These challenges and data gaps will need to be addressed if we are to be confident that improvements are being made in this area.

Proposed Strategic Objective:

"To improve access to a sustainable, inclusive and safe transport system in rural Scotland."

Do you agree with the proposed strategic objective for transport?

RCN Scotland response:

Yes.

As with our comments in relation to housing, above, RCN Scotland members working and studying in rural areas cite transport issues as a major barrier to living and working in rural Scotland.

Key Performance Indicators

For health and social care, which of the below data indicators should be scored as high priority, medium priority or not appropriate for inclusion in the Rural Delivery Plan?

- ***Quality of care experience***
- ***Self-assessed general health***
- ***Healthy life expectancy (males)***
- ***Healthy life expectancy (females)***
- ***Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) score***
- ***Experience of out of hours healthcare***
- ***Rating of health, care or support services***
- ***How easy it is for people to contact their General Practice in the way they want***
- ***Balance between caring and other things in their life***
- ***Supported to continue caring***

RCN Scotland response:

RCN Scotland is concerned that some of these indicators focus on user experience, which can be very subjective and variable, rather than outcomes which are easier to measure. For example, the indicator of "Rating of health, care or support services" may not provide the information required to assess whether the strategic objective is being met. An indicator such as this would also not necessarily collect views on unmet need as respondents may only answer in relation to services they actually accessed. A better option may be an indicator which focuses on outcomes, such as rating how people feel their health needs or care needs are being met.

As well as the above, indicators to measure the quality of service provision from the view of those delivering health and social care in rural areas should be considered.



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