

Key messages from the RCN Northern Ireland Board meeting

30 September 2024

- 1 In her opening remarks, the RCN Northern Ireland Board Chair formally welcomed Senior Business Accountant Ingrid Blake to her first Board meeting.
- 2 The Board received a further verbal briefing on the RCN pay campaign in Northern Ireland. The Board noted that retrospective payment of the backdated 2023-2024 Agenda for Change pay award has now been completed by the HSC Business Services Organisation. In respect of the 2024-2025 Agenda for Change pay award, the Board noted that no award has yet been formulated in Northern Ireland because of the financial position facing the Northern Ireland Executive. The Board was reminded of the extensive steps taken to date by the RCN to address this, including conversations with the Health Minister and a range of Northern Ireland politicians, as well as formal written representations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the political party leaders, all 18 Northern Ireland MPs, the Finance Minister, and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Board members were also briefed on the underlying financial issues and the attempts being made by the Northern Ireland Executive to address these. The Board noted that a bulk email update to all RCN members in Northern Ireland will be sent later in the week. The position is being kept under close review by the Board and all options remain open in the event of Northern Ireland nursing staff being detached from pay parity with the rest of the UK.
- 3 The Board received, discussed and approved a series of quarterly governance assurance reports. These comprised: the performance highlight report for the second quarter of 2024; an updated risk register; a summary report on the delivery of the Board's operational plan during the second quarter of 2024; and an operational performance data report covering the second quarter of 2024. Various matters for clarification were raised by Board members and addressed by staff.
- 4 The Board received a briefing on the public inquiries in relation to health care issues currently taking place in Northern Ireland. These comprise allegations of the abuse of patients at Muckamore Abbey Hospital, Southern Health and Social Care Trust urology services, neurology services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, proceedings related to hyponatraemia, as well as the UK Covid-19 public inquiry.
- 5 The Board received, noted and approved progress reports for the second quarter of 2024 in relation to the RCN Northern Ireland branch operational plans.
- 6 The Executive Director gave a detailed verbal update on a number of key current issues. These included: the RCN's involvement in the development of a Royal Colleges alliance in Northern Ireland; consultations on a new Public Health Bill for Northern Ireland and the principles underpinning the forthcoming safe and effective staffing legislation; ongoing work in addressing and eliminating corridor care, in line with the priorities outlined in the RCN UK report published earlier this year; and the RCN's concerns over the professional nursing implications of the current management of change process at the Public Health Agency, along with the actions taken by the RCN to date in order to articulate and represent these concerns on

behalf of affected individual members and the wider nursing profession. The Board agreed a range of further measures in order to escalate these concerns.

- 7 A verbal briefing was provided on the current Northern Ireland Board election process. The deadline for nominations was Monday 30 September 2024.
- 8 The Board received an update on Northern Ireland consultation responses that are currently being progressed. Members' significant professional concerns over proposals outlined in the Department of Health consultation on the principles underpinning a new Public Health Bill were noted. The RCN's response to this consultation has been endorsed by the Board in advance of submission in line with the 14 October 2024 deadline. The response will be available on request after that date. A response has been submitted to a Department for the Economy consultation on the content of an Employment Rights Bill for Northern Ireland, whilst the RCN's response to the Department of Health consultation on the principles underpinning the forthcoming safe and effective staffing legislation is currently being finalised. The RCN is also preparing a response to an Executive Office consultation on the draft Programme for Government, in line with the 4 November 2024 deadline.
- 9 RCN Northern Ireland branch officials joined the Board meeting for the open session.
- 10 The Board received a verbal report on the developing arrangements for RCN Congress 2025, which will be held in Liverpool from 12 to 15 May.
- 11 Update reports were received and noted from RCN Council, the Trade Union Committee, the Professional Nursing Committee, the UK Reps Committee, the Nursing Support Workers Committee, and the UK Students Committee.
- 12 The Board received and discussed presentations on the lessons learned from RCN strike action across the UK in recent years and in relation to the current review of RCN Congress. A task and finish group is being established in order to develop the Board's response to the internal RCN consultation on this review.
- 13 A verbal update on the work of the RCN Northern Ireland Nursing Policy and Practice Department was received and noted.
- 14 The Board received and noted update reports from the Director and the Board Chair.
- 15 The Board agreed its confirmed meeting dates for 2025. The next quarterly meeting of the RCN Northern Ireland Board will take place on Monday 2 December 2024.