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31 March 2023

Cabinet Secretary
NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

Colin Poolman
Director

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Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Many congratulations on your confirmation as Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care. We wish you well in this new role and look forward to working positively with you and your team to tackle the challenges facing our health and care services and ensure that Scotland has the nursing workforce it deserves.

Over 4,000 registered nurse posts are unfilled, in the NHS alone, impacting on the safety and quality of patient care and putting even more pressure on staff. This demonstrates the scale of the crisis facing patients and staff and the need for urgent action to tackle the exodus of nursing staff from our profession and to make nursing a career of choice once again.

The recent announcement of the new Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce is therefore very welcome and we look forward to working with you, and other key stakeholders, to take forward the action needed to address the workforce crisis. The Taskforce's work needs to proceed at pace, delivering funded, timely, meaningful and sustainable actions that make a positive difference for the nursing profession. As well as developing a retention strategy, the Taskforce must consider as a priority how to grow the domestic nursing workforce and expand the routes into nursing.

We are continuing to work with Scottish government officials on the implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act. Ahead of implementation, there is an urgent need to address the ongoing level of investment that will be required to tackle nursing vacancies and ensure that health and care providers can meet their safe staffing duties. Long term health and care workforce plans, based on demand and population need, are required to ensure long-term nursing supply.

Whilst the recent vote to accept the NHS pay offer ends the immediate threat of strike action by RCN Scotland members, as you are aware, a significant minority of our members

voted to reject the offer. The chronic staffing shortages and low morale that led to the overwhelming strike mandate are still very real, and the close vote in our ballot is a demonstration of our members' continued frustration and concern.

Much more is required for nursing staff to feel valued and the Scottish Government's commitment to reform Agenda for Change is welcome. The framework must be modernised to recognise the clinical skills and expertise of nursing staff and further improvements to pay, terms and conditions are needed in the years ahead.

The delay to the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill is also welcome, as are the First Minister's comments about reviewing the funding for social care and engaging further with stakeholders. The RCN has serious concerns about the current Bill and we are calling for the development of detailed plans before taking forward legislation. We believe the focus should be on tackling the workforce crisis in social care and community health. Services must have the right numbers of staff, with the right skills, in the right place and this needs to start with increased investment and improving pay, terms and conditions in the sector. We would like to request an introductory meeting with you to discuss these priorities. We understand that your diary will be very busy but would appreciate a meeting as soon as possible as we believe it would be beneficial to have an initial discussion ahead of the first meeting of the Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce.

We would also like to invite you to RCN Scotland's *Valuing Nursing in Scotland roundtable event* on Wednesday 3 May from 10am – 12noon at the Scottish Parliament (Room T20/21). Representatives from all political parties, CNOD and RCN members have been invited. In advance of the roundtable, we will be publishing our second annual RCN Scotland Workforce Report, which will provide useful context for the discussion. We held a similar event last year which provided politicians and stakeholders with an insight into the experience of nursing staff working across a range of services and we're looking forward to another valuable discussion in May. We would appreciate it if you could rsvp by emailing niki.stark@rcn.org.uk

We look forward to engaging constructively with you and your new ministerial team to protect the future of nursing and build a sustainable workforce to meet Scotland's needs.

Yours sincerely,



Julie Lamberth
Chair
RCN Scotland Board



Colin Poolman
Director

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excellence in practice and shapes health policies

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