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Via email: firstminister@gov.scot

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Director

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Dear First Minister,

Many congratulations on your confirmation as Scotland's new First Minister. We wish you well and look forward to continuing to work positively with you and your government to tackle the challenges facing our health and care services and ensure that Scotland has the nursing workforce it deserves.

Thousands of registered nurses are missing from health and care teams across Scotland, impacting the safety and quality of patient care. These vacancies put even more pressure on staff who are already working extra unpaid hours to cover gaps and going home feeling that they are unable to provide the quality of care they want. The current pressures and staff shortages have resulted in unsafe conditions being normalised, including the unacceptable practice of treating patients in inappropriate places such as corridors, waiting rooms and store cupboards.

Meanwhile, for the second year in a row, the number of places on nursing degrees have not been filled. This demonstrates the scale of the crisis 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.

As you are aware, the RCN has been working with Scottish government colleagues to address these issues. We were clear that the Agenda for Change Review recommendations had to support career progression and nursing staff retention in the longer term. While it is welcome that the Scottish government has committed to implementing the recommendations from the Agenda for Change Review, Ministers must now move swiftly to open negotiations for the 2024-25 pay award.

The joint health trade unions submitted our claim in February. Our members deserve to receive an increase that reflects current living costs and addresses the historic erosion of their pay as soon as possible given that we are now over a month into the new financial year. The chronic staffing shortages and low morale, that led to our overwhelming strike mandate, are still very real and our members' have made clear their continued frustration and concern about the nursing workforce crisis facing Scotland's NHS.

We welcome the recent implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019. While the legislation will not immediately address the current acute staff shortages, the new duties on employers

and government should make a difference for patients, service users and staff. We are, however, clear that it must be accompanied by increased investment in services to enable providers to tackle vacancies and recruit and retain the workforce that Scotland needs.

The Ministerial Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce has been progressing, listening to nursing and midwifery staff, and developing recommendations to address the nursing workforce crisis and demonstrate that our safety critical profession is valued. We cannot afford for this essential work to be delayed and look forward to working with the Cabinet Secretary to ensure the Taskforce delivers meaningful and sustainable change.

We would like to request a meeting with you to discuss the Scottish government's support for Scotland's nursing staff and your plans for health and social care recovery and reform. We understand that your diary will be very busy but would appreciate a meeting as soon as possible.

We look forward to continuing our constructive engagement with you and your ministerial team to protect the future of nursing and build a sustainable workforce for the future.

Yours sincerely



Julie Lamberth, Chair, RCN Scotland Board



Colin Poolman, Executive Director, RCN Scotland

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