

## Key messages from the RCN Northern Ireland Board meeting

2 December 2024

- 1 In her opening remarks, the Board Chair thanked retiring member Laura McClintock for her service to the Board. She also congratulated RCN Northern Ireland Executive Director Professor Rita Devlin in respect of the recent conferment of the title of Honorary Professor of Practice by the Queen's University of Belfast.
- 2 The Board received a further verbal briefing and update on the RCN pay campaign in Northern Ireland. The Board noted with concern the continuing absence of a formal 2024-2025 Agenda for Change pay award and the current position whereby the Health Minister has stated that backpay can only be funded with effect from 1 July 2024 instead of from the beginning of the current financial year. This arrangement would, if implemented, fail to restore pay parity with the rest of the UK. It was noted that a further meeting between the health trade unions and the Health Minister is now scheduled for 10 December 2024. In parallel with this process, the RCN and the British Medical Association [BMA] are meeting later this week to discuss a potential joint approach to the pay award issue and to consider the scope for developing co-ordinated industrial action. The Board also endorsed the recent decision of the RCN UK Trade Union Committee (as ratified by the RCN UK Council) not to engage with the NHS Pay Review Body process in respect of the 2025-2026 award.
- 3 The Board received, discussed and approved a series of quarterly governance assurance reports. These comprised: the performance highlight report for the third quarter of 2024; an updated risk register; a summary report on the delivery of the Board's operational plan during the third quarter of 2024; and an operational performance data report covering the third quarter of 2024. Various matters for clarification and information were raised by Board members and addressed by staff.
- 4 The Executive Director gave a detailed verbal update on a number of key current issues. These included: RCN concerns over HSC 'winter pressures' and 'winter preparedness' across the system, the latest developments with the proposed statutory duty of candour, the next steps in the drafting of the safe and effective staffing legislation, proposed joint working with the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation [INMO] in relation to corridor care issues, the priorities and key focus for the delivery of the RCN strategic plan during 2025, and continuing RCN concerns over the implications for nursing of the Public Health Agency organisational review.
- 5 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.
- 6 The Board received, noted and approved a series of progress reports for the third quarter of 2024 in relation to the RCN Northern Ireland branch operational plans.

- 7 The Board noted the RCN's recent decision no longer to hold an active presence on the X social media channel. It was confirmed that the RCN UK social media team is currently exploring new platforms and how the organisation can effectively use them to communicate with members. The Board agreed that, pending the outcome of these developments, communication with members in Northern Ireland will continue through other existing social media channels, the weekly update, and bulk emails.
- 8 A number of RCN Fellows from Northern Ireland joined the open session of the Board meeting for a wide-ranging discussion on ways of maximising their potential contribution to the work of the organisation. This discussion embraced, for example, professional leadership and expertise, mentorship, and policy development. The Board subsequently agreed to develop, agree with the Fellows and publish an action plan to take forward a range of joint initiatives in order to address these issues.
- 9 The Board approved a process for the election of its Chair and Vice Chair for terms of office from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2026.
- 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 The Board received a verbal update on Northern Ireland consultation responses that have recently been submitted and those that are currently being progressed.
- 12 A verbal update on the work of the RCN Northern Ireland Nursing Policy and Practice Department was received and noted.
- 13 The Board received a hybrid presentation from Northern Ireland RCN Workforce Champion Janine Compston and RCN Professional Lead (Nursing Workforce) Lena Johnson on the development of the RCN Workforce Champion initiative.
- 14 Update reports were noted from RCN Council, the Trade Union Committee, the Professional Nursing Committee, and the Nursing Support Workers Committee.
- 15 The Board received and noted update reports from the Executive Director and the Board Chair.
- 16 The next quarterly meeting of the RCN Northern Ireland Board will take place on Monday 17 February 2025. An induction session for new Board members will be held on Thursday 23 January 2025, with a further induction session yet to be scheduled.