

RCN Wales Board

Minutes of the open meeting held on 23 February 2024
commencing at 10.20

The meeting was held in the RCN Wales Board headquarters, Ty Maeth, Cardiff
and via Teams

Present	Position
Jacquelin Davies	Chair, RCN Wales Board / Wales member on the Trade Union Committee
Alison Magor	Board member
Anne Stevenson	Board member
Catherine Jones	Board member – <i>via Teams</i>
Euan Hails	Board member – <i>via Teams</i>
Gaynor Jones	Board member
Lynne Puckett	Board member
Mark Crothers	Board member
Nicola Milligan	Board member
Richard Hughes	Board member
Apologies	
Steve Watson	Vice Chair / Council member for Wales
Dr Carolyn Middleton	Wales member on Professional Nursing Committee
Kokila Swamynathan	Board member
Neil Thomas	Board member
Susan Williams	Board member
Nicky Hughes	Associate Director of Nursing (Employment Relations)
In attendance:	
Helen Whyley	Director, RCN Wales
Sandy Harding	Associate Director of Nursing (Professional Practice)
Helen Carlyon	Finance & Business Continuity Manager
Katie Branch	Quality & Events Manager
Heather Searle	Executive Assistant to the Director, RCN Wales

1. WELCOME

1.1. Apologies for Absence

The Board Chair welcomed everyone to the Open session.

Apologies had been received from Board members, Carolyn Middleton, Kokila Swamynathan, Neil Thomas and Susan Williams. Vice Chair of Board, Steve Watson and Associate Director of Nursing (Employment Relations), Nicky Hughes left the meeting early due to representing RCN Wales at the Welsh Conservative party conference.

The Board Chair welcomed Senior Officer, Aimee Williams and Communications & Media Officer, Kate Israel as observers for the session.

1.2. Declaration of Interests

The Board Chair asked Board members to declare any possible interests with any items on the agenda.

No further declarations were made.

2. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

2.1 Minutes from the previous meeting

Minutes of the Board meeting held on 22 September 2023 had been circulated and were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2.2 Review of Action Sheet

All actions were either noted as completed or updated on the action sheet.

2.3 Matters Arising

There were no further matters arising.

3. OPERATIONAL UPDATES

3.1 RCN Wales Board Chair's Report

A report had been received and was noted.

The Board Chair took the Board through the paper.

There were no questions or comments from the Board.

3.2 Director, RCN Wales Report

A report had been received and was noted.

The Director took the Board through the report and highlighted the following:

- The Voice of Nursing event at the Senedd last September was well attended and provided an opportunity for members to provide Members of the Senedd with lived experiences.
- The Director attended the Plaid Cymru conference last October with the Vice Chair of Board and engaged with the Plaid Cymru Members of the Senedd.
- The evidence session at the Welsh Parliament Health Committee importantly reviewed the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016. The Board Chair also gave evidence and provided lived experience. A report is awaited on the findings of the committee.
- Meetings with Executive Directors of Nursing and Heads of Schools of Nursing continue. Support for another RCN PhD student is being explored with the Deans and Chief Nursing Officer.
- Visits to A&E departments have been undertaken to understand firsthand the challenges faced by members. A joint visit is being planned with the Chief Nursing Officer to the Grange Hospital.
- A closer relationship is developing with the Chief Executive at Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) and quarterly meetings are in place. HEIW have split the Executive Director of Nurse and Health Professional Education and advertised a new Director of Education post. The post will need to be a registrant, however not necessarily of nursing.
- Introduction meeting was held in December for the Social Partnership Council. This has been formed under the procurement law, appointed to and Chaired by the First Minister. This has a large remit and still forming and updates will be brought to future Board meetings.
- The Director had been invited to join the Pro-Judge stakeholder group and the study event in October shared initial findings. These findings could be useful for future progress and challenge reports.

A concern was raised by the Board regarding the HEIW vacancy if a non-nurse registrant is appointed. The website advises a doctor or dentist could apply. The Board were advised this appointment is being monitored.

3.3 Correspondence report

A report had been received and was noted.

The Director reminded the Board that correspondence is available to view by contacting the Director's office.

The Director highlighted the following correspondence:

- The correspondence highlighted in red have not yet had a response and these are monitored.
- A letter was sent to the Chair of the Health & Social Care Committee regarding whether nursing associates should be included in the Committee's review of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016.
- The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions would like to visit Wales in June as part of a safe staffing tour. The programme is being worked out and will be shared with the Board.

The Board queried letter 7 as detail was missing. It was confirmed this was an invite letter to the International summit in HQ last December.

3.4 Policy, Parliamentary & Public Affairs Impact Report

A report had been received and was noted.

In the absence of the Policy, Parliamentary & Public Affairs Officer, the Director and the Associate Director of Nursing (Professional Practice) highlighted the following:

- The Board are asked for views on the planned activities, consultations and committee inquiries listed in the paper.
- The Board was advised that currently there is no campaigning currently taking place. Therefore the Board is asked to agree the Wales Board Campaign Sub-Group reconvene in January 2025 with focus on Welsh Government election campaign.

The Board asked whether cross party events were still continuing in the Senedd. The Board were advised that the last one held in November was on children's health. The programme for 2024 is being organised and Jenny Rathbone, MS is remaining as Chair of the group.

The Board agreed the recommendations in the paper.

4. STRATEGIC UPDATES

4.1 Occupational Health

A report had been received and was noted.

Debra Harding, Occupational Health Consultant joined the meeting. The Board were taken through the paper and the following highlighted:

- The paper reviewed the occupational health workforce in Wales and succession planning. Welsh Government are also progressing a piece

of work around occupational health which will influence the work carried out on behalf of RCN Wales.

- Work is being carried out by the UK Government on the provision of occupational health services, although this work has not yet been published and its content not been shared. This may also influence the work carried out for RCN Wales.
- Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) have recently confirmed occupational health nurses will be commissioned in Wales. Currently there is a long way to travel for these qualifications, so this is positive news for Wales. It is hoped that HEIW register this with the NMC.

The Director advised many members are off work unwell and cannot access occupational health and reasonable adjustments in a timely fashion. This position is undervalued. It was asked if there are providers in Wales to support the qualification and will it be a Specialist Practitioner Qualification (SPQ). It was confirmed that it has been written as an SPQ and Cardiff University may support this.

The Board asked whether more occupational health consultants are being considered. It was advised that occupational health nurses with the right qualifications and experience could perform the occupational health consultant nurse position.

The Associate Director of Nursing (Professional Practice) advised when speaking to heads of Occupational Health departments, health boards have differing opinions. It was confirmed that some occupational health managers are not nurses, so can have a different perspective.

The Board commented that it is important to raise the profile of this important role and suggestion was made that student nurses spend time in the occupational health department.

The Board agreed the recommendation and thanked Debra Harding for joining the meeting.

4.2 Learning Disability Nursing

A report had been received and was noted.

Dr Ruth Northway, Mental Health & Learning Disability Adviser joined the meeting. The Board were taken through the paper and the following highlighted:

- The paper outlines the key issues for learning disability nurses based on research undertaken. People with learning disabilities continue to

experience health inequities and premature and avoidable deaths. Learning disability nurses have a key role to play but workforce numbers are declining. A coordinated, strategic approach to addressing this situation is required.

- A strategic plan is recommended alongside monitoring and coordinating current practice. The Board were invited to comment and ask questions.

The Board asked what the prioritised areas were and how the RCN could assist. It was advised that although Health Education Improvement Wales (HEIW) have been trying to improve recruitment, only half the number of places were commissioned and only half of these were filled. Many roles are not hospital based and not always seen and considered by students. There is a role for the RCN with messaging and promotion and the learning disability event was very positive.

The Board asked how supportive health boards are to placements in this area. It was confirmed that generally the support is there but placements are difficult in community roles. Also learning disability student nurses take placements in other areas and get drawn to a different sector.

It is important to inform students of their options in learning disability. Many students have personal experience that can be drawn on. Learning disability level 1 is now mandatory in all registered nursing courses but more could be done to promote this area to students

The Board expressed concern that students do not have enough information about treating a patient holistically. In the community, learning disabilities are not always seen and other factors such as assessing the environment can take priority.

The work is continuing and the Board will be kept informed as it progresses. The Board Chair thanked Dr Ruth Northway for her work to date and for joining the meeting.

4.3 RCN Institute

A report had been received and was noted.

Nichola Ashby, Deputy Chief Nurse joined the meeting and presented slides to the Board. The following was highlighted:

- The RCN Institute of Excellence had been approved to commence from January 2024 and will deliver the goals of the RCN 5-year strategy. The RCN Institute will have five Academies raising the voice of nursing through a unified approach from the professional and trade union offer through a sustainable, financial model. This will be supported by RCN

staff, fellows, representatives, forums, networks, and professional activists.

- The Institute will help improve what the RCN does and strengthen the profile and professional side of work carried out. It will help to influence and how members are supported to raise their voice. It will also help with commercial opportunities.
- The aim is for the to be relevant throughout the nurses' careers by creating the active professional and the professional activist.
- The Academies are currently being developed and appointments made. The aims are still being worked through and will engage with the countries and regions across the RCN.

The Board advised that previously, other organisations took bits from the RCN and will the Institute improve the RCN's standing. It was confirmed research has been carried out about where the leadership offer is positioned in the market with a move towards leadership in nursing being a career choice.

The Board enquired how RCN Wales could influence. The Board were advised that there is already the political leadership programme which is not being run in other parts of the RCN. The idea is to bring these programmes together to enhance and grow the offer, rather than changing good work already being carried out. There are great training programmes across the RCN but carried out in isolation, that would benefit from business school affiliation. The Associate Director of Nursing (Professional Practice) confirmed that other organisations had been in touch regarding the political leadership programme.

The Board asked about the Activist Academy and how it will fit into the Institute. It was confirmed that this Academy will be aligned to the other 4 Academies and all will work together. The Activist Academy will be looking at how members use their voice through an organising model and helping members to become more active.

The Board Chair thanked Nichola Ashby, Deputy Chief Nurse for attending the Board.

4.4 NHS Wales Partnership Forum Update

The Director spoke to the paper in the absence of the Associate Director (Employment Relations) and the following was highlighted:

- The full NHS Wales Partnership Forum met on 16 November 2024.

- Regarding waiting times, it was reported that good progress is being made in reducing the number of people waiting for over 2 years on a number of pathways. There are now no patients waiting over 6 years.
- The NHS Wales Executive was introduced on 1 April 2023. Phase 1 brought together existing national bodies to operate as the Executive. Phase 2 will provide formal clarification, establishment, and delivery of further functions as part of Phase 2. These include: innovation and value, a workforce delivery function, emergency planning co-ordination, and implementation arrangements for the National Clinical Framework
- There has been widespread stakeholder engagement to develop the collective approach to CPD for the whole NHS Wales which is due to be consulted on imminently.
- Unsocial hours payments now reinstated after 1 week's sickness absence from 1 March 2023 for a 12-month period and subject to a formal review in partnership.
- Concerns were raised by the RCN about members not seeing tangible benefits particularly in terms of overtime payments, career progression, CPD and the recruitment and retention premia. It was also raised that the safe staffing work was not being undertaken in social partnership.

The Board commented that members are keen to see progress as these elements were accepted in good faith.

4.5 Independent Sector and Social Care report

A report had been received and was noted.

Pam Penman, Independent Sector and Community Adviser joined the meeting. The Board were taken through the paper and the following highlighted:

- There has been a move to more face-to-face roundtable events and less meetings of the steering group. The roundtable events have achieved greater visibility and collaboration for the RCN within the independent sector in Wales and feedback from participants has been extremely positive.
- The next event will be around nurse leadership in the independent sector.

- The RCN Wales Leadership for the Independent Sector programme commenced in November with 10 participants from across the sector, this is progressing well and will be repeated.
- There is increased interest in commissioning the pre-registration nursing course for Healthcare Support Workers in the Independent Sector through part time routes. The importance of commissioning a Specialist Practice Qualification for Health and Social Care has been raised with Welsh Government.

The Board asked for further details on this last point. It was confirmed that Health Education Improvement Wales funded 30 places for healthcare support workers but this is not enough. RCN Wales has a seat on the group looking into this.

The Board Chair thanked Pam Penman, Independent Sector and Community Adviser for joining the meeting.

4.6 Pay spine consultation update

The Director presented slides regarding the pay spine consultation being carried out in England. At present the consultation is only in England but could have implications for Wales. The following was highlighted:

- Agenda for Change is now 20 years old. Since its implementation, nursing roles have changed, and many members do not feel the band they are on reflects the role they now do. In England, only 22% of members feel the band correctly reflects the role.
- In England, as part of the pay offer to RCN members, the UK government committed to exploring the idea of a separate nursing pay spine. In an election year, it is the right time to explore this work.
- If nursing in England does get taken out of Agenda for Change, this cannot be ignored in Wales due to the high numbers of nurses. The government consultation can be commented on by anybody, however the RCN is specifically targeting English members.
- Paramedics now have annex 21 and frustrating that nurses do not have this. It is important to look at what aspects of Agenda for Change do not still fit for nursing.

The Board commented that members are saying job descriptions are outdated and do not fit current roles. It is appealing to members to have a clear progression from a band 5 to 6.

The Board will be kept informed as this work progresses in England.

5. ITEMS TO NOTE

5.1 Report from RCN Council meetings held on 28 September and 25/26 October 2023

The reports had been received and were noted.

The Board had no questions or comments.

5.2 Reports from the Professional Nursing Committee held on 6 September and 13 December 2023

The reports had been received and were noted.

The Board had no questions or comments.

5.3 Report from the Trade Union Committee held on 13 September 2023

A report had been received and was noted.

The Board were advised the TUC discussed at length whether to participate with the Pay Review Body (PRB) this year. The advice given to Council was to provide credible and robust evidence but to clearly state that the PRB is not deemed to be impartial and independent.

5.4 Report from the Student Committee held on 19 September 2023

The report had been received and was noted.

The Board had no questions or comments.

5.5 Report from the UK Reps Committees held from June-October 2023

The report had been received and was noted.

The Board had no questions or comments on this report.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 The Board Chair raised the submission of an emergency item for Congress regarding nursing associates in Wales. The written statement from the Minister for Health and Social Services was published after Congress items closed, and an emergency item should meet the criteria. An internal discussion would be helpful to get this right in Wales following feedback from England and lessons learnt.

Five Board members volunteered to discuss this matter further.

ACTION: A Teams meeting to be set up to discuss a potential emergency item for Congress.

- 6.2 There was a suggestion to hold the fundraising dog walk for the scholarship funds on 12 May to coincide with International Nurses Day.

The Board Chair closed the meeting at 13:05.