



Royal College of Nursing Northern Ireland

Supplementary evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body: 2022-2023

Introduction

- 1 The Royal College of Nursing [RCN] in Northern Ireland is pleased to submit supplementary evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body [NHS PRB] in order to inform its deliberations on the 2022-2023 pay round. This supplementary evidence should be considered in conjunction with the RCN's UK submission to the NHS PRB and with reference to the remit letter submitted by the Northern Ireland Minister for Health to the Chair of the NHS PRB and dated 13 December 2021.**
- 2 The RCN notes that the Minister's remit letter references his view that "affordability and sustainability must be balanced with the need for fair pay", and that the NHS PRB's recommendations should, accordingly: "take account of the challenging fiscal and economic context and the affordability of pay awards, particularly in the Northern Ireland context, where our integrated system of health and social care brings proportionately more staff into Agenda for Change terms and conditions". This raises the question of whether the Department of Health has appropriately learnt from the experience of the industrial action, including strike action, taken by nursing staff in Northern Ireland during December 2019 and January 2020, as well as the outworking of the imposed 3% pay award for 2021-2022, which is currently the subject of a consultative ballot by RCN members in Northern Ireland. In particular, the Minister's remit letter, whilst acknowledging "the need for fair pay", suggests that, once again, the Department of Health intends to prioritise the "affordability" of a pay award before any consideration either of what constitutes "fair pay" in the context of current inflation rates and other pressures, or the measures required to sustain a nursing workforce that is capable of meeting the healthcare needs of the people of Northern Ireland. Once again, it gives the RCN no pleasure to point out that it is this type of approach,**

workforce in Northern Ireland grew by just 20%, whilst the HSC learning disability nursing workforce contracted by 27%. It must be remembered that the Department of Health has routinely estimated for many years that overall demand for health and social care services increases by around 5%- 6% each year. The Northern Ireland Executive Department of Finance, in its current 2022-2025 draft Budget consultation paper, states: "The cost of providing the services DOH delivers is increasing with estimates suggesting some 6.5% annually. This is due to an increasing ageing population with greater and more complex needs, increasing costs for goods/services, and growing expertise and innovation which means an increased range of services, supporting improvement in our population health. All of these bring increases in the funding required each year to maintain services and meet demand." It is, therefore, easy to identify from where the mismatch between supply and demand derives in relation to the Northern Ireland nursing workforce.

- 10 The Department of Health's own HSC staff survey, conducted on a triennial basis, was most recently undertaken during 2019, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. It found that just 27% of nurses working within the HSC believed there were enough staff in their employing organisation for them to be able to do their job properly. Some 59% of nursing staff (compared to 50% of all HSC staff) worked unpaid overtime.**

nursing staff in Northern Ireland work additional hours at least once each week and that 44.8% of those who work additional hours do so unpaid. Almost half (43.1%) of Northern Ireland nursing staff surveyed said that they had not taken if

16 The RCN has consistently highlighted how the previous reductions in the number of commissioned pre-registration nursing education places in Northern Ireland that took place between 2009-2010 (825) and 2015-2016 (645) were storing trouble for

has acknowledged previously how the system is currently unable to cope with more than the additional 300 pre-registration students each year; particularly in

current crisis. The Department of Health, the Health and Social Care Board (as the current regional commissioning body) and the HSC trusts are all, in various different ways, responsible for workforce planning and it is primarily their responsibility to evaluate, understand and address the reasons underpinning the various challenges that currently beset the nursing workforce in Northern Ireland.

22 Workforce planning is essentially a commissioning activity. It should be based upon an analysis of the healthcare profile, needs and current inequalities of the people of Northern Ireland, supplemented by an overview of the current nursing workforce and an informed prediction of how many additional nurses (and, equally importantly, in what areas of practice) will be required to meet the needs of the population and the strategic commitments of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive over the ensuing period. These considerations link with the need to move towards enhanced multi-year planning and funding for health and social care in Northern Ireland, a subject that has rightly engaged the Assembly and the Executive in recent months and which now appears to have been addressed through the draft 2022-2025 Executive budget consultation.

award at this level, forming an essential down payment, will restore lost earnings