



Royal College of Nursing  
Northern Ireland

**RCN**  
**NORTHERN**  
**IRELAND**  
**MANIFESTO**  
for the 2016  
Northern Ireland  
Assembly elections

**The Northern Ireland Assembly elections on 5 May 2016 provide an important opportunity for RCN members to help set the health agenda for the next five years.**

**The RCN Northern Ireland Board has agreed a series of strategic priorities that we believe all our political parties must address in order to deliver the very best health care services for the people of Northern Ireland. They focus upon building political consensus on the way forward, prioritising public health and reinstating partnership working, and delivering fair pay for nurses in Northern Ireland.**

**We hope that RCN members will use these priorities to engage with candidates in their own constituencies and to seek their commitment and support for nurses and nursing in Northern Ireland. We also hope that election candidates and the parties they represent will endorse these priorities and help ensure that they are delivered.**

### **1 Will your party choose to take the health portfolio as a priority if in a position to do so?**

The RCN recognises the challenging nature of the role of Health Minister within the Northern Ireland Executive. However, we do not agree that political responsibility for the health and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland should be regarded by our political parties as some kind of poisoned chalice. The RCN believes that there is a strong consensus within health and social care on the priorities for the new Health Minister and that there will be considerable goodwill towards a Minister who is prepared to engage with organisations and individuals in determining a way forward. The RCN believes that it would be an important declaration of the political commitment to reform and modernise health and social care if our political parties would

choose to take the health portfolio, if they are in a position to do so, when ministerial responsibilities are allocated after the election.

### **2 Does your party believe that public health priorities should be included in the Programme for Government?**

The DHSSPS has a statutory responsibility to promote an integrated system of health and social care that is designed to secure improvements in the physical and mental health of people in Northern Ireland, promote the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness, address health inequalities and improve the social well-being of the people of Northern Ireland. The RCN believes that these public health priorities must be included in the Programme for Government for 2016-2021 in order to underline the collective responsibility and accountability of the Northern

Ireland Executive for ensuring that they are delivered.

### **3a Will your party commit to establishing, chairing and facilitating a cross-party strategic group to deliver the reform and modernisation of the health service?**

### **3b Will your party commit to establishing a review body for nursing in Northern Ireland to ensure that the profession is enabled and supported to facilitate the reform and modernisation of health and social care?**

The RCN welcomed the establishment of the Expert Panel led by Professor Rafael Bengoa and supports its intention to build consensus across all political parties for the reform and modernisation of health and social care. The RCN believes that the outcomes of the Expert Panel will need to be reinforced by the establishment of a cross-party strategic group to deliver the reform and modernisation process that is agreed by the Expert Panel. We also believe that there is a need to establish a review body for nursing to ensure that the nursing workforce in Northern Ireland is equipped to deliver reform and modernisation by addressing a range of professional and workforce issues that are of concern to nurses and nursing.

### **4 If your party takes the health portfolio, will you commit to re-establishing the HSC Partnership Forum for the DHSSPS, HSC employers and trade unions?**

The RCN believes that the delivery of an effective health and social care system which delivers excellence and ensures better outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland depends upon valuing, respecting and engaging with the health and social care workforce that delivers treatment and care. Effective partnership working between the DHSSPS and representatives of our health and social care workforce is essential. However, the DHSSPS has abolished the Partnership Forum, a body that included organisations such as the RCN which represent the health and social care workforce. We believe that this must be re-established immediately in order to ensure that staff representative/professional organisations and the DHSSPS are able to work together to build an effective workforce that is supported in its ultimate objective of delivering the very best health and social care system for the people of Northern Ireland.

### **5a Will your party respect the role of the independent NHS Pay Review Body and abide by its recommendations on nurses' pay?**

Delivering an effective health and social care service means ensuring that the workforce is treated fairly. This includes fair pay. The RCN welcomed the recent announcement by the Health Minister that he has honoured the conclusions of the independent NHS Pay Review Body in determining the 2016-2017 pay award for nurses and other health staff. The RCN believes that this is the fairest way to determine nurses' pay and urges

all Northern Ireland political parties to commit to engaging fully with, and respecting the recommendations of, the NHS Pay Review Body for the full 2016-2021 Northern Ireland Assembly mandate.

**5b Will your party work with the NHS Pay Review Body to ensure that the pay inequalities currently experienced by nurses in Northern Ireland are addressed and resolved as soon as possible?**

A health care assistant employed in a band 2 post in Northern Ireland is currently paid £806 less per year than a counterpart in England and £1064 less than in Scotland. A newly-qualified

band 5 staff nurse in Northern Ireland is currently paid £214 per year less than a counterpart in England and £340 less than in Scotland. An experienced staff nurse in Northern Ireland is currently paid £207 less than a counterpart in England and £567 less than in Scotland. The NHS Pay Review Body has stated that it wishes to give these issues particular focus in its next report, or even before, and to take early and comprehensive evidence in this respect. The RCN welcomes this intention and calls upon all political parties to co-operate with the NHS Pay Review Body and end the pay inequalities currently experienced by nurses and other health care staff in Northern Ireland.

**The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.**

Published April 2016

Royal College of Nursing, Northern Ireland  
17 Windsor Avenue  
Belfast  
BT9 6EE

028 90 384 600

[www.rcn.org.uk/northernireland](http://www.rcn.org.uk/northernireland)

 @RCN\_NI



Royal College of Nursing  
Northern Ireland



Publication code 005 596