



The Regulation and  
Quality Improvement  
Authority

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# ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT

2024-2025



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# Foreward

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This is the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority's (RQIA's) eleventh Annual Quality Report, covering the period April 2024 to March 2025.

This report provides an overview of how RQIA, as Northern Ireland's independent regulator of health and social care services, aligns its quality improvement activities to the Department of Health's Quality 2020, a ten-year strategy designed to protect and improve quality in health and social care.

Encouraging and supporting quality improvement is central to all the work that we do. As Northern Ireland's regulatory and improvement body for statutory and independent health and social care services, RQIA has a key role in providing assurance to the Department of Health, seeking to evidence that care is safe, effective, compassionate and well-led. We publish our reports so that the public can access our findings across the range of services we inspect and review.

RQIA assesses quality across health and social care through inspection of individual services and review programmes that may include key themes and standards that crosses organisations or service boundaries. We examine arrangements in place to assess if the delivery of those services is meeting the quality standards expected of including best practice, as well as the quality of leadership and governance in those services.

The lived experience of service users, patients and clients, is a key aspect of seeking evidence of the quality of services, and critical part of our work is listening to the experience of service users, and their loved ones.

During the year, RQIA's Guidance Team responded to and individually case managed around 1,000 contacts by telephone, email or in writing from families, the public and service providers. Some 78% of these were from service users, relatives and members of the public wishing to discuss queries or concerns about care services, a rise of 18% on the same time period last year. Each of these experiences shared with RQIA adds value to our assessment of the risks when deciding what action may be required to respond to concerns about a service. We use our independent role, underpinned by legislation, to challenge poor practice, and to seek improvements.

RQIA also listens to staff working across the health and social care sector, and their experience adds further insights. All of these sources of information help us in cross-referencing information from a range of sources to support RQIA's regulatory role. RQIA continues to strengthen our work by building effective partnerships and collaboration with others: with other statutory organisations, and with professional and systems regulators.

During 2024-25, RQIA welcomed the addition of HSCQI to the organisation. This integration into RQIA aims to strengthen HSCQI's vision, as outlined in the HSCQI Strategy Moving Forward, Shaping the Journey 2022–2024. This vision is to inspire Northern Ireland's health and social care community to become a global leader in quality improvement and innovation, and to complement RQIA's statutory duty to encourage improvement in the quality of services. You can find out more about this work in HSCQI's Annual Quality Report 2024-25, available [here](#). An overall RQIA Annual Quality Report for 2025-26 will be produced, incorporating the Quality Improvement work of HSCQI.



**Brieghe Donaghy**  
Chief Executive



**Christine Collins MBE**  
Chair

# Introduction

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RQIA's Annual Quality Report 2024-25 provides an overview of how its quality improvement activities are aligned with the five strategic goals of Quality 2020: A 10-Year Strategy to Protect and Improve Quality in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland:

- **Transforming the Culture**
- **Strengthening the Workforce**
- **Measuring the Improvement**
- **Raising the Standards**
- **Integrating the care**

This report describes RQIA's progress in the areas of quality and continuous improvement to support the delivery of Quality 2020's strategic goals. It highlights RQIA's significant role in assuring the quality of health and social care for all those in receipt of these services.

RQIA has adopted the HSC regional Core Values. These are: working together; excellence; compassion; and openness and honesty.

RQIA also values: Putting those impacted by the health and social care system at the heart of all that we do; Using evidence as the foundation for all our actions; speaking and acting independently, and with integrity; and Working in partnership with others.

These values underpin all our actions and decisions. As Northern Ireland's health and social care regulator RQIA has a clear vision for how its activities ensure care is safe, effective, compassionate and well-led.

RQIA works closely with providers of health and social care services in order that people in Northern Ireland can experience a better quality of health and social care services.

RQIA registers and inspects a wide range of independent and statutory health and social care services. Through its Review Programme it assures the quality of services provided by the HSC Trusts and agencies. It also undertakes a range of responsibilities for upholding the quality of care for people with mental ill health and those with a learning disability.

RQIA is also committed to hearing and acting on the experiences of patients, clients, families and carers. It is only by working in partnership with service users and providers of care that RQIA can effectively encourage and influence improvement in direct care experience.

This report sets out progress made under each of the five Quality 2020 strategic goals.

# Theme 1: Transforming the Culture

Objective 1: We will make achieving high quality the top priority at all levels in health and social care.  
Objective 2: We will promote and encourage partnerships between staff, patients, clients and carers to support decision making.

## Governance and Assurance

The RQIA Governance Framework sets out in an accessible manner the roles, responsibilities and procedures for the effective and efficient conduct of these arrangements by RQIA's Authority, its committees and Executive Management Team.

RQIA's Authority, supported by its Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and Business, Appointments and Remuneration Committee (BARC), are responsible for the oversight of corporate performance and governance arrangements within the organisation. Through regular meetings, arrangements for financial probity, risk management and audit are assessed. The Authority also oversees corporate performance reporting of RQIA's progress against strategic and operational aims and objectives and its commitment to quality improvement.

RQIA manages its activities through three directorates, supported by Business Services, and during the year the Office of the Chair and Chief Executive was established. The directorates are:

- Adult Care Services
- Hospital Services, Independent Health Care,
- Reviews and Audit
- Mental Health and Learning Disability,
- Children's Services and Prison Healthcare

As part of RQIA's Performance Management Framework, regular performance management meetings took place, reporting against key performance indicators and progress in meeting set objectives for each Directorate. On a quarterly basis, an Activity Performance and Outcomes Report is presented to the Authority, via BARC, for discussion and approval, which enables Authority members to assess how RQIA is performing.

This report is complimented by the Financial Performance Report, presented to the Authority via ARAC on a regular basis. RQIA's Performance Management Framework brings together the corporate Strategic Plan, Annual Business Plan, Risk Management Strategy and the Activity Performance and Outcomes Report.

RQIA's Strategic Plan 2022-28 includes four strategic objectives:

1. **Scrutiny:** register, inspect, report and enforce
2. **Improve:** safety and quality;
3. **Build:** partnerships to strengthen safety;
4. **Inform:** service transformation.

These are underpinned by three enabling priorities:

- Excellence in collective leadership and effective governance;
- Develop a confident, competent, supported and enabled workforce
- Ensure effective management of our resources, including finance, information technology and accommodation.

RQIA's programme of internal audit provides the Authority Members and the Department of Health with assurance on governance arrangements. Internal Audit re-audited the Registration Processes during 2024-25 and reported Satisfactory Assurance, noting that improvement has been achieved in:

- Development of KPIs and timescales throughout registration process;
- iConnect;
- Quality Checks and learning; and
- Guidance and communication with applicants.

## Living Our Values

As the independent health and social care service regulator, RQIA's values are:

- Putting those impacted by the health and social care system at the heart of all that we do.
- Using evidence as the foundation for all our actions.
- Speaking and acting independently and with integrity.
- Working in partnership with others.

RQIA's actions and decisions are also underpinned by the regional health and social care (HSC) values: working together; excellence; openness and honesty; and compassion.



Working together



Excellence



Openness & Honesty



Compassion

## Public Involvement in Inspections and Reviews

RQIA is committed to increasing effective engagement with the public and stakeholders to achieve improvements in the safety and quality of health and social care services. RQIA's Service Improvement Officer represents the organisation at the regional Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) Forum, which aims to support HSC organisations in the active and effective involvement of service users, carers and the public in decisions that affect their health and social care.

During the year RQIA continued piloting the involvement of Inspector Support Volunteers in a small cohort of care home inspections. This aims to bring an independent, lay perspective to our assessment of services and to hear about the experiences of those availing of the services we inspect and review.

## Action on Concerns about Health and Social Care Services

On a daily basis, RQIA's Guidance Team responds to calls from families, the public and service providers. During 2024-25, RQIA received almost 1,000 telephone calls and email messages. The majority of these contacts (around 59%) were from service users, relatives and members of the public who wished to seek advice or discuss issues about health and social care services.

In each case, RQIA's Guidance Team members listen to callers to establish the particular issues, and provide appropriate advice. Where specific concerns are raised, this information is assessed and considered to determine an appropriate response and next steps, which may include:

- following up the issues raised with management of a service
- conducting an unannounced inspection to investigate the concerns;
- or where necessary, considering enforcement action.

## Complaints about Health and Social Care Services

Listening to the lived experiences of service users and their loved ones is most important to RQIA in helping to ensure that health and care services address concerns and improve.

Every health and social care service is required to have its own arrangements in place to manage complaints. RQIA checks that these are in place during its inspections of services.

Where concerns are received, RQIA takes these very seriously. Each is carefully considered and assessed to determine if there are any issues that require immediate action. RQIA may take a range of actions, from recording the information to provide us with a fuller view of a service; following up concerns with the relevant health and social care trust or organisation; to conducting an inspection of the service to follow up the concerns raised.

RQIA provides advice and guidance on its website to support the public in raising their concerns about health and social care service. While RQIA does not have legal powers to investigate complaints about services, it provides contact details for organisations that can support the public through the health and social care complaints processes, including: the Patient and Client Council (PCC); HSC Trust complaints teams; and where a complainant is dissatisfied with the service's response, NIPSO.

## Complaints About RQIA

Complaints are a valuable source of learning for an organisation, and RQIA welcomes contact from people with concerns about its actions or how it conducts its work.

During 2024-25 RQIA received eight complaints, which included RQIA's inspection processes, oversight of care homes and RQIA's role in the monitoring of mental health detention forms. In each case, following a review of the issues raised, these were managed in line with RQIA's Complaints Policy.

RQIA's approach to complaints management is aligned with the regional HSC Complaints Procedure, which states that complaints should be acknowledged within two working days and a response issued within 20-working days. In line with this direction, all eight complaints were acknowledged within this deadline.

Five complaints were responded to within the 20-day timescale. The complexity of some complaints may make it difficult to investigate and to provide a full response within these timescales. Two complaints were resolved outside of the 20-day timescale, however, on each occasion, regular updates were provided to the complainant on the progress of their complaint. One complaint remained ongoing at 31 March 2025. In each case complainants were advised that if they were dissatisfied with RQIA's response, they can take their complaint to NIPSO.

Recommendations and learning from complaints are collated in a learning report for recording, action and follow up. These recommendations are also shared with senior management, to provide oversight of the process.

## Whistleblowing

Anyone who works within a health and social care service can make a whistleblowing disclosure to RQIA about a concern or wrongdoing within that service under The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which details the protection for those making such disclosures.

### Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

UK legislation



During 2024-25, RQIA was contacted on 101 occasions by staff from both statutory and independent health and social care settings, who wished to 'speak up' about issues in their workplace. Almost half of these disclosures were from care home staff, while one sixth were from HSC trust services, including mental health services and HSC hospital staff. One third of disclosures related to care issues.

While some staff provided their name and contact details, which allows RQIA to follow up concerns more fully, others wished to remain anonymous. In every case the information was reviewed to determine appropriate action, including unannounced inspections to follow up the issues raised.

# Supporting Improvements in Services

## Part III Services

Inspections of registered services are undertaken by RQIA under Part III of The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (the 2003 Order) and in line with The Regulation and Improvement Authority (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 (as amended). These regulations direct RQIA to inspect each nursing home, residential care home and children's home at least twice each year; private dental services once every two years; voluntary adoption agencies once every three years and all other registered services (adult placement agencies; day care settings; domiciliary care agencies; independent health care services; nursing agencies and residential family centres) at least once per year. The vast majority of RQIA's inspections (78%) are unannounced, with 97% of care home inspections taking place with no advance notice to the provider.



## Part IV Services

RQIA has oversight of and inspects mental health and learning disability services; services using ionising radiation treatments; children's services (other than children's homes); and health care in secure settings including prisons. These activities are governed by Part IV of The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and a range of other legislation, standards and guidance.

## Inspections

RQIA's inspection teams comprise experienced nurses, social workers, pharmacists, estates and finance officers, who assess service provision and delivery. During the year RQIA conducted a total of 1,578 inspections.

Each inspection considers the quality of leadership and management within each service, observes practice and reviews records of care. RQIA examines the arrangements in place to ensure the delivery of safe, effective, compassionate and high quality care, in line with relevant legislation, standards and guidance.

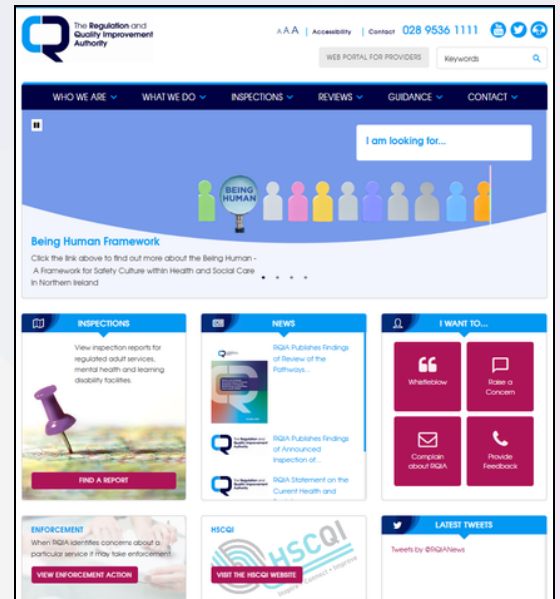
The most important people in any service are those in receipt of care, and where possible, inspectors also speak with carers, friends and relatives about their experience of the services they receive.

To ensure a fully rounded view of the service, inspectors talk to management, staff and health care staff such as GPs, tissue viability nurses, social workers and care managers to hear their views and experience of the service.

# Sharing Information: Digital Communication

Throughout the year RQIA continued update the content of its website [www.rqia.org.uk](http://www.rqia.org.uk) to ensure it provided information to support service providers and the public alike. During 2024-25 RQIA received around 210,000 visitors, resulting in 700,000 webpage views. This represents a 10 per cent increase in visitors from 2023-24.

To date, over 20,000 inspection reports for independent, voluntary and statutory health and social care services have been published on RQIA website, [www.rqia.org.uk/inspections](http://www.rqia.org.uk/inspections) and are available directly through the search function on the RQIA homepage. RQIA's inspection reports continue to be the most visited pages on the website, accounting for over half the total number page views during the year (370,000).



Web pages listing enforcement action undertaken by RQIA were viewed almost 22,000 times during the year. Following a decision to publish anonymised inspection reports for children's services, these reports received over 1,500 views. RQIA also directs traffic to the website via [@RQIANews](https://twitter.com/RQIANews), the RQIA's X account, where new content added can be notified immediately to over 6,200 followers.

## Political Engagement

RQIA continued its engagement with representatives from the main political parties. This included regular one-to-one meetings with their health spokespersons, where the Chair and Chief Executive discuss RQIA's Management Plan; current priorities; and specific constituency issues, and heard the views of elected representatives on a wide range of issues. RQIA also welcomed individual contact from politicians on a range of constituency and regional issues.

During the year RQIA's Chief Executive, Chair and Deputy Chair attended the Health Committee on two occasions. In June 2024, RQIA provided a briefing on its role and current priorities, and in March 2025 we provided an overview of RQIA's Review of the Pathways Associated with the Temporary Suspension of Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital.

Throughout the year RQIA provided the Department of Health with input to a wide range of Assembly Questions (AQs). In November 2024, RQIA joined fellow system and professional regulators at an information event at Parliament Buildings, where MLAs had the opportunity to meet RQIA's Chief Executive and senior colleagues to discuss our work and to demonstrate the benefits of a joined-up approach to regulation.



# Theme 2: Strengthening the Workforce

Objective 3: We will provide the right education, training and support to deliver high quality service.

Objective 4: We will develop leadership skills at all levels and empower staff to take decisions and make changes.

## RQIA Staff Profile

As at 31 March 2025, there were 140 staff in post (132.01 whole time equivalent including those on temporary contracts), excluding Authority Members, bank and agency staff. During 2024-25, there was an average staff absence rate of 7.13% against a regional key performance indicator of 7.50%, set for RQIA by DoH. During 2024-25, there was a turnover of permanent staff of 8.24%, with 12 members of staff leaving RQIA through retirement or taking up new opportunities.



During the year RQIA advertised for a range of administration and inspector positions, which attracted a high level of interest. These were advertised on [www.jobs.hscni.net](http://www.jobs.hscni.net), the official website for HSC jobs in Northern Ireland, and promoted on RQIA's 'X' social media account. In 2024-25, 18 permanent new staff joined the organisation, including nine staff from HSCQI who joined RQIA



from the Public Health Agency under TUPE arrangements.

In addition, two people joined the organisation as 'bank' staff.

The RQIA Pilot Hybrid Working Scheme, with staff working part of each week in the office and the remaining time at home continued to operate during the year.

## Investing in Staff

# INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

## We invest in people Silver

an IiP Silver Award. In November 2024, as part of a formal IiP assessment, a survey was issued to all staff to help evaluate progress in relation to a range of measures including staff perceptions and organisational culture. In early January 2025, to explore these themes further, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with a cross section of staff at all levels and with the Chief Executive and Authority members. Following this assessment RQIA was reaccredited with IiP Silver Award.

RQIA initially achieved Investors in People (IiP) recognition in 2014 and was successfully reaccredited in 2017 and again 2021, achieving

## Staff Training and Development

RQIA's staff are its most valuable asset, and RQIA is committed to supporting and developing these staff, providing access to training opportunities to support the successful delivery of organisational objectives. RQIA staff have access to an annual training calendar which included training in a range of areas including: human resources; financial management; human rights, safeguarding and Mental Capacity Act; and job-specific training to support staff in their daily work. During the year, all staff were also required to undertake a range of mandatory training.

## My Home Life Leadership Support Programme

During the year, RQIA continued to support the My Home Life Leadership Support Programme, an internationally recognised educational programme, delivered by Ulster University for care home managers and staff in leadership roles. This programme recognises the important role of care home managers and their staff in supporting people living in Northern Ireland's care homes.



My Home Life aims to improve the quality of life for people living, dying, visiting, and working in nursing and residential homes. The programme runs over a 10-month period during which participants are guided by professional facilitators to advance their skills, engage with evidence-based relationship-centred practice, and resolve the very complex issues that impact upon the quality of their service.

During the year, senior inspectors from RQIA's Care Homes team supported the delivery of this leadership programme through their attendance and participation in a face-to-face meeting with each of the cohorts throughout the year. RQIA will continue this ongoing partnership in the year ahead.



Supporting Care Home Staff in developing their leadership skills and confidence, will undoubtedly contribute to continuous quality improvement and benefit residents and staff across the whole service. RQIA actively support the My Home Life Programme.

Briege Donaghy, CEO RQIA

# Theme 3: Measuring the Improvement

Objective 5: We will improve outcome measurement and report on progress for safety effectiveness and the patient/client experience.

Objective 6: We will promote the use of accredited improvement techniques and ensure that there is sufficient capacity and capability within the HSC to use them effectively.



The Regulation and  
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## Key Facts



### Corporate Information



**Budget** · £10.67m



£9.45m revenue resource  
limit (DOH funded)

£1.22m other income,  
including fees

**Staffing**



**141 staff** (133.3 whole time equivalent)

Staff Turnover: **8.24%**

**76% Female / 24% Male**

Average staff absence rate of **7.13%**  
against a regional key performance  
indicator of **7.5%**

### Information Requests



**62** Media responses  
**53** Freedom of Information requests  
**13** Subject Access requests



### Complaints About RQIA

During 2024-2025, **8** complaints were received about RQIA, which were managed in line with the regional complaint process. Complaints were received about RQIA's inspection processes, oversight of care homes and RQIA's role in the monitoring of mental health detention forms.



### Guidance Team

During 2024-25 RQIA's Guidance Team recorded and individually case managed **996** contacts/concerns. 78% of these concerns were raised by services users and their families. 55% of all concerns related to care issues.

### Website



During 2024-25 RQIA's website received around **210,000** visitors. Our most visited pages were Inspection reports (370,000 page views). Web pages listing enforcement action undertaken by RQIA were viewed almost 22,000 times during the year. Following a decision to publish anonymised inspection reports for children's services, these reports received over 1,500 views.

# RQIA's Programme of Reviews

RQIA may conduct reviews of health and social care services, using its powers under Article 35 of the 2003 Order in response to current events, or to examine emerging issues. RQIA may initiate a review, or they may be commissioned by the Department of Health, or in response to a request from another HSC organisation. In preparing for and planning a review, and reporting on findings, RQIA's focus is on safe, effective and compassionate care; and on the quality of leadership within a service.

The purpose of RQIA's review programme is to provide independent and professional assessments to the Minister of Health, through the Department of Health, and to the public about the quality, safety and availability of health and social care (HSC) services in Northern Ireland.

In each review, RQIA aims to identify areas for improvement, and make recommendations as well as highlight examples of good practice. RQIA shares lessons learned and supports and drives quality improvements for service users across the sector. Where relevant, RQIA also provides evidence to form a basis for future policy development in the areas under review. The findings of each RQIA review are reported to the Minister of Health and Department of Health, and published on the RQIA website, with the aim of further improving and developing leadership, patient safety, service delivery, and compassionate care for service users.

## **A Review of the Pathways Resulting from the Temporary Suspension of Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital**

In March 2024 the Department of Health commissioned RQIA to undertake a review of the pathways resulting from the temporary suspension of emergency general surgery at South West Acute Hospital (SWAH). Led by RQIA, the Expert Review Team included doctors with backgrounds in general surgery, and emergency medicine, and paramedic services. The team spent time in the SWAH, meeting staff, both from the Western Trust and Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. They observed services in operation and reviewed documents and available data. They also visited Altnagelvin Hospital and the Ambulance Control Centre, and met with a wide range of patients and families and a number of representative groups who shared their experience of the arrangements following the suspension of emergency general surgery at the hospital. This participation was invaluable to the review team in forming its view.

The review highlighted issues around the information available to the Western Trust in its oversight of the effectiveness of the temporary arrangements put in place. The review found that there was insufficient patient-centred information available to ensure that the Trust Board would be alerted to potential issues and concerns, and so enabled to make informed, evidence-based decisions. This included a lack of feedback on the direct patient experience of the new pathways.

The review, completed in October 2024, was published under a Ministerial statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly in January 2025, and made ten recommendations for improvement. While focussed on the new pathways put in place as a result of the temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery in SWAH from December 2022, RQIA considers that the review team's recommendations are strategically relevant to all situations where services are changed in a time of crisis.

## **Review of Urology Services in Southern Health and Social Care Trust**

In August 2022, the Chief Medical Officer wrote to RQIA requesting an independent review of the Southern Trust's Urology Services and Lookback Review of patients previously under the care of a named consultant. The review, conducted in a phased manner, assessed the trust's look back exercise; considered governance and assurance arrangements; and patient views and experience. The reports of the expert review team findings, including 16 recommendations for improvement, were shared with the Department of Health for its consideration.

## **RQIA Investigation into Commissioning Arrangements for Residential Learning Disability Services in the South Eastern HSC Trust and the Belfast HSC Trust**

During 2024 RQIA Inspectors highlighted a number of concerns in relation to residential learning disability services provision, and the effectiveness of the HSC Trust systems and processes to provide appropriate commissioning, planning and provision for complex cases and ongoing monitoring of safe care delivery. This investigation sought to explore the role of the HSC Trusts in the commissioning, planning and provision of care and the effectiveness of the role of the Trusts as commissioner of these services. The review team met with care home managers and staff, observed practice, and engaged with service users, their advocates and families.

RQIA has made nine recommendations for improvement, focusing on several key areas for improvement within the arrangements for commissioning and oversight of residential learning disability services across Northern Ireland.

## **Expert Review of Records of Deceased Patients (Neurology)**

In July 2024, the Health Minister announced the commissioning of RQIA to undertake a further phase (Phase Three) of the expert review of records of deceased patients (neurology). This involved the records of 18 patients who died under the care of neurologist Michael Watt, and whose families had approached RQIA since the publication of Phase Two of the review in late 2022.

Following this announcement RQIA commissioned the Royal College of Physicians to undertake an Invited Service Review of these records. RQIA anticipates that the review of these records will be completed during 2025-26.

In addition, the Minister advised that any further families who were interested in having their deceased family member's clinical records reviewed should contact the RQIA, no later than 31 December 2024. During this time, a number of families approached RQIA, of whom eight have expressed an interest in having their deceased relatives' records reviewed. RQIA anticipate receiving direction from the Health Minister to commission a further phase of the review, which will be referred to as Phase 3, Group 2.

## **Other Ongoing and Planned Review Activity**

- Developing a Patient Safety Culture Assessment Framework
- Passport for Learning Disability Patients
- Follow up on Recommendations from Southern Area Whole System Inspection, January 2024R

# Theme 4: Raising the Standards

Objective 7: We will establish a framework of clear evidence-based standards and best practice guidance.

Objective 8: We will establish dynamic partnerships between service users, commissioners and providers to develop, monitor and review standards.

## Public Involvement in RQIA's Work

RQIA is committed to increasing effective engagement with the public and stakeholders to achieve improvements in the safety and quality of health and social care services.

**Personal and Public Involvement (PPI)**



**Involving you, improving care**

RQIA's Service Improvement Officer represents the organisation at the regional Personal and Public Involvement (PPI)

Forum, which aims to support HSC organisations in the active and effective involvement of service users, carers and the public in decisions that affect their health and social care.

During the year RQIA continued piloting the involvement of Inspector Support Volunteers in a small cohort of care home inspections. This aims is to bring an independent, lay perspective to our assessment of services and to hear about the experiences of those availing of the services we inspect and review.

## Meaningful Engagement Service User During Inspections

RQIA places a strong focus on improving how we can enable meaningful feedback from service users and providers during inspections.

RQIA worked with service users and providers to develop questionnaires for use during inspections that allowed them to provide meaningful and impactful information to ensure we receive a fully rounded view of services and to support improvements in services.

RQIA introduced the "user friendly" questionnaires in a range of settings including bespoke services for people in receipt of end of life care; and medicines-focused questionnaires were used during the year, and in March 2025 we reviewed the effectiveness of this approach.

During 2024-25, RQIA's Service Improvement Officer led the development of questionnaires for use in learning disability supported living and day care services, which will be introduced in the year ahead. A revised and updated inspection report template was also developed and piloted in adult care services, and initial feedback from providers has been positive.

This will also support future work to develop a comprehensive engagement and feedback toolkit to ensure effective engagement with families, carers and staff during RQIA inspections.

# Theme 5: Integrating the Care

Objective 9: We will develop integrated pathways of care for individuals

Objective 10: We will make better use of multidisciplinary team working and shared opportunities for learning and development in the HSC and with external partners.

RQIA has positive working relationships with the Department of Health, and the wider health and social care system, including:

- HSC Trusts, including Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust
- Children's Court Guardian Agency for Northern Ireland
- HSCQI Alliance
- Mental Health Champion
- Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency
- Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery
- Northern Ireland Social Care Council
- Patient and Client Council
- Public Health Agency
- Strategic Planning and Performance Group (DoH)

Throughout the year, RQIA engaged with these partner organisations on a regular basis to discuss common interests, and share both learning and areas of concern. These include quarterly liaison meetings with HSC Trusts focusing on a range of service-specific operational issues, and ad hoc meetings on specific emerging issues.

RQIA works to strengthen effective partnerships with peer organisations. These included the Care Quality Commission; the Health Care Professionals Council; Professional Standards Authority; Care Inspectorate Scotland; Healthcare Improvement Scotland; Health Inspectorate Wales; the Health Information and Quality Authority; Improvement Cymru; The General Dental Council; General Medical Council; the Health and Safety Executive NI; and Nursing and Midwifery Council.

RQIA also works closely with other inspectorates and representative bodies including:

- Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI)
- Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
- Education and Training Inspectorate
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)
- Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)
- Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

RQIA also continued its constructive engagement with a range of stakeholder representative organisations, including:

- Association for Real Change
- British Dental Association
- Homecare Association
- Independent Health and Care Providers (IHCP)
- Royal Colleges of Nursing, General Practitioners, Physicians and Psychiatrists

To support information sharing and cooperation in joint working, and transparency when working on areas of common interest, RQIA has developed a range of memoranda of understanding and information sharing protocols in partnership with a range of organisations.

In November 2023, RQIA held its first round table event, bringing together senior leaders from across health and social care system, to focus on speaking up; listening, hearing and acting; and changing the culture in order to support better outcomes for those using HSC services. Building on this, during 2024-25, RQIA hosted a two further events in May and December 2024 to explore the development of an open, just and learning culture across the wider HSC system with senior leaders across health and social care and service user representatives.

These events included facilitated discussion on current patient safety focussed initiatives across the HSC, and considering how a HSC Patient Safety Culture Assessment framework can enable and support these initiatives. The intent is to provide a common framework, with principles and measures, that will enable an assessment of the impact of those initiatives across the system. Since these events work in this area has progressed, with RQIA using its statutory role, to progress the development of a credible framework that can become a trusted assessment tool across HSC organisations.

### In Conversation: Dr Henrietta Hughes, Patient Safety Commissioner (England)



In May 2024, RQIA held 'In Conversation' with Dr Henrietta Hughes. This event, which was attended by leaders across HSC in Northern Ireland, provided an overview of Dr Hughes role as Patient Safety Commissioner, with a focus on priorities, progress and barriers, including the introduction of "Martha's rule" which gives patients, families and carers access to a rapid review of their loved one's care, where they have concerns about a patient's condition. Participants heard about the role Martha's Rule has played improving safety and reducing harm in the health system in England.

### Emerging Concerns Protocol: Regional Framework for Sharing Intelligence

At the same event in May, The Joint Regional Regulators Forum, consisting of regulators across health and social care in Northern Ireland, launched a Framework for Sharing Intelligence, which included an Emerging Concerns Protocol. The purpose of the framework is to help ensure risks are identified, reviewed and addressed at the earliest opportunity, supporting regulators in health and social care in Northern Ireland to work together and to openly share information, promoting openness and transparency.





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