

29 April 2021

Mr Keith McBride  
The Health Committee Clerk  
Room 419  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX.

Email only: [Committee.health\\_HSCbill@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:Committee.health_HSCbill@niassembly.gov.uk)

Dear Mr McBride,

### **RQIA Evidence to Health Committee on Health and Social Care Bill**

I thank Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide you with a short response on the important issue of the Health and Social Care Bill (the Bill), as introduced in the Assembly, by the Minister of Health, on 8 March 2021.

RQIA's (The Authority's) Mandate, set out in The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003<sup>1</sup>, The Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009<sup>2</sup>, and in the 2011 Department of Health Framework Document<sup>3</sup>, is to provide the Minister, through the Department, with ongoing independent assessment of and assurance on the quality, safety and availability of health and social care services; and to regulate effectively those services which we register and inspect.

The Authority is a body corporate, employing a multidisciplinary team of 130 people, who work across Northern Ireland. As an arm's length body of the Department of Health, the Authority is operationally independent of, but accountable to, the Department of Health. The Authority's Chair and Members, who are appointed by the Minister, set the Authority's strategic direction; and oversee its performance of its functions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2003/431/contents/made>

<sup>2</sup> Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009. Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2009/1/contents>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) Framework Document (September 2011). Cited: April 2021. Available from: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/dhssps-framework-document-september-2011>

RQIA, 9th Floor	Tel	028 9536 1111
Riverside Tower,	Email	<a href="mailto:info@rqia.org.uk">info@rqia.org.uk</a>
5 Lanyon Place	Web	<a href="http://www.rqia.org.uk">www.rqia.org.uk</a>
Belfast BT1 3BT	Twitter	@RQIANews



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The Authority registers and inspects the availability and quality of a wide range of health and social care services, provided by both the public and independent sectors, across Northern Ireland. Authority inspectors make assessments of quality against minimum care standards, set by the Department of Health, which ensure that both the public and service providers know what quality of services is expected.

Where we find issues with the safety or quality of care delivered, we work with providers to make improvements.

The Authority is wholly supportive of the Bill and the plans to transition existing functions of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board to the Department of Health and HSC Trusts, as recommended in the Donaldson Report (2014). The potential benefits are clear, with certain functions coming closer to the Department of Health and others being devolved to Trusts, to achieve more streamlined and responsive decision making and planning functions and to support the delivery of safe, effective and accessible services for the population of Northern Ireland.

With regard to the Bill itself, the main effect on the Authority, is to remove references to the HSC Board from The Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 and The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

A number of the functions which currently fall to the Health and Social Care Board are vital in assuring and improving the quality of HSC services. The Authority currently works closely with officers of the HSC Board on matters such as, monitoring of dental services, contracting of independent health care, oversight of safeguarding, oversight of serious adverse incident investigations; and on all commissioning, planning and performance monitoring functions. Being itself an Arm's Length Body of the Department of Health, the Authority recognises potential opportunities for even closer joint working and collaboration in respect of our assurance and improvement roles. The Authority is now working closely with colleagues on the Health and Social Care Migration Project Team to ensure that going forward we build clear principles of co-operation and sustain the effective working relationships that support RQIA in its work.

I hope that you find this evidence useful in your future consideration of the Bill. I would of course be happy to provide any further clarification on this position if this would be of help.

Yours sincerely



Dr A.B Stevens OBE  
Interim Chief Executive

RQIA, 9th Floor	Tel	028 9536 1111
Riverside Tower,	Email	info@rqia.org.uk
5 Lanyon Place	Web	www.rqia.org.uk
Belfast BT1 3BT	Twitter	@RQIANews



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cc Christine Collins, RQIA Chair  
Emer Hopkins, Acting Director of Improvement, RQIA  
Andrew Dawson, Director of Quality Regulation and Improvement, DoH

RQIA, 9th Floor Riverside Tower, 5 Lanyon Place Belfast BT1 3BT	Tel	028 9536 1111
	Email	<a href="mailto:info@rqia.org.uk">info@rqia.org.uk</a>
	Web	<a href="http://www.rqia.org.uk">www.rqia.org.uk</a>
	Twitter	@RQIANews



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