



RCPsych NI Comments on the Equality Impact Assessment implications of the 2024-25 DoH Budget Outcome

Introduction:

Please note that the Royal College of Psychiatrists is the statutory body responsible for the supervision of the training and accreditation of Psychiatrists in the UK and for providing guidelines and advice regarding the treatment, care and prevention of mental and behavioural disorders. Among its principal aims are to improve the outcomes for those with mental illness and to improve the mental health of individuals, families and communities.

The College has approximately 440 members in Northern Ireland, including Doctors in training. These Doctors provide the backbone of the local Psychiatric service, offering inpatient, day patient and outpatient treatment, as well as specialist care and consultation across a large range of settings.

This is submitted on behalf of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Northern Ireland Devolved Council.

General Background Comments:

The [Mental Health Strategy 2021 to 2031](#) was published in June 2021. This Strategy is both about developing and transforming mental health services in Northern Ireland. It is recognised by DoH NI that there is an increased prevalence of 25% of people with mental disorders in Northern Ireland in comparison with the population in England. With regard to funding, there is 27% less per capita funding here in comparison with England and 20% less in comparison with Republic of Ireland. In addition, some mental health services are delivered through very old and inappropriate buildings which need capital

investment. There has been no significant attempt historically to address this very significant imbalance.

When the Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 (Mental Health Strategy) was published, it was accompanied by a [Funding Plan](#). This Funding Plan recognised how much finance mental health services would need, in order to be improved and how far they had fallen behind other countries in the British Isles. The annual revenue costs and capital investment required for the 10 years were set out within the Funding Plan, based on 2021 costings. It was envisaged that the Health Minister would work with the other Government Departments to improve the funding for mental health services. However, with the 2-year breakdown in Government, this was not carried out. Since the Government has been re-established, the financial and budgetary situation has changed significantly, with attendant concerns as to the fiscal impact on the planned and costed developments in this area.

The Workforce needed to meet the requirements for the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy for all of the relevant professions was published in [The Northern Ireland Mental Health Services Workforce Review 2022 to 2032](#) (Workforce Review). This indicated a significant need to expand the Workforce and also the numbers of students in training.

Psychiatry is a profession under much pressure. The vacancy rate in 2023 for Consultant posts in Northern Ireland is 24.6% and for SAS Doctors is 28.8%. This is a major increase in the vacancy rates from 2017. The situation is continuing to get worse. A report commissioned by DoH and prepared by Dr Paddy Woods based on figures for 2021, with the aim of ascertaining how to try and stabilise the Psychiatry workforce due to retirements and the then vacancy rate, has not yet been published. This Dr Paddy Woods report is separate from the aforementioned Workforce Review. Morale is low among Psychiatrists due to work conditions within the context of a shrinking workforce, yet expanding Patient need – and a number are leaving Northern Ireland to work in other jurisdictions.

Response to Consultation Questions:

- 1. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in section 5 of the EQIA Consultation document? If so, what are they? Please provide details**

People with a mental disorder or a learning disability are already in a situation of catastrophic impacts on service provision as described in the General Background Comments above. This is ahead of the further proposed cuts in the health service budget. It had already been fully recognised that there is a significant increase in prevalence of mental disorders in Northern Ireland and the relative low funding per capita in comparison with the other nations of the United Kingdom and with the Republic of Ireland.

In section 5 under the Disability section, there is a vague acknowledgement of the impact on learning disability but no mention of a mental disability. The Department must advocate for these Patient cohorts.

Many people with a mental disability also qualify within the other section 75 groups, which contributes to the complexity of section 75 groups. Yet this is not recognised in any meaningful way, except in a vague reference to people who qualify under more than one section 75 group.

The lack of funding to meet the pay awards will be a serious disincentive for all staff in mental health services where their roles are already under very significant pressure with a high percentage of vacancies.

With regard to Psychiatrists, our vacancy rate is already a significant disincentive. If there is the addition that our current pay is 20% less than in England and 110% less than in the Republic of Ireland, then this will be a major issue and exacerbate an already desperate employment situation.

2. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts in allocation of the Department's draft budget

There needs to be a more concentrated and structured engagement on budget issues with the professions and the Community and Voluntary sector. This must include RCPsych NI. The current solutions which are offered do not incorporate the needs for mental health services.

3. Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to this EQIA or the consultation process generally?

This Consultation, by both content and process, seriously under-represents what is needed for mental health and learning disability services in Northern Ireland, given the previously accepted reality that there needs to be a significant stepping up of the budget for these services. This is necessary to meet the already significant drop in real terms funding for existing services, as well as the requirements of the Mental Health Strategy and the Workforce Review.

Similarly, there is a failure to address the funding needs of dementia, substance use, suicide prevention and other mental health related strategies/pathways.

In addition, there is no acknowledgement of the immediate needs for Psychiatry Trainees to meet the current vacancy rates and projected retirements as addressed in the currently unpublished report carried out by Dr Paddy Woods, with much input from RCPsych NI.

This Budget will spell not only catastrophic immediate impacts for mental health and learning disability services, but potentially disastrous and irreversible consequences as well.

Dated this 25th day of July 2024

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Anderson', followed by a period.

Dr Julie Anderson

Consultant Psychiatrist, Chair of RCPsych NI & Vice President RCPsych

Contact: thomas.mckeever@rcpsych.ac.uk