

1 December 2017

Response from the Royal College of Nursing Wales to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee consultation on the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Bill

The Royal College of Nursing Wales is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Outlined below are some overarching points in relation to the relevant terms of reference.

The Royal College of Nursing is in agreement that the Public Services Ombudsman plays a vital role in ensuring that any member of the public who believes they have suffered injustice through maladministration or service failure by a public body is able to make a complaint with the reassurance that their complaint will be dealt with fairly and independently.

The Royal College therefore welcomes the extension of powers to investigate, in certain circumstances, matters relating to private health services. It is right that an investigation is able to follow the citizen, rather than being constrained to cover only a particular sector. This is particularly important given the increasing levels of integration between health and social care in Wales. In November 2014, the Ombudsman's powers were extended to cover social services complaints in the private sector, and it follows therefore that these powers are extended in a similar regard to cover the private health sector.

The Royal College is also supportive of the Bill's aim to help facilitate and improve the making of complaints by the most vulnerable and deprived in society, such as people with learning difficulties and the homeless, by removing the requirement to submit a complaint in writing.

The Public Service Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2016/17 reports that 38% of complaints received about public bodies were on the subject of health. Having an effective and responsive complaints service is an important part of ensuring that improvements are made to existing health care services. The Royal College of Nursing therefore welcomes any efforts made to be more responsive to public complaints and to ensuring there is an effective complaints process in place. It is important that the Public Services Ombudsman is able to work closely and effectively with regulators such as Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales. A requirement for these bodies to share Memorandum of Understanding with the Ombudsman may want to be considered if appropriate.

Given the extension of the role of the Public Services Ombudsman under this new legislation, consideration will need to be given about whether or not additional resources will be required in order for the role to be carried out effectively. Also important is for the public to be made aware of the new legislation if/when it comes into force, and that awareness raising initiatives are carried out as appropriate.

About the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 430,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, including over 25,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing. The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.