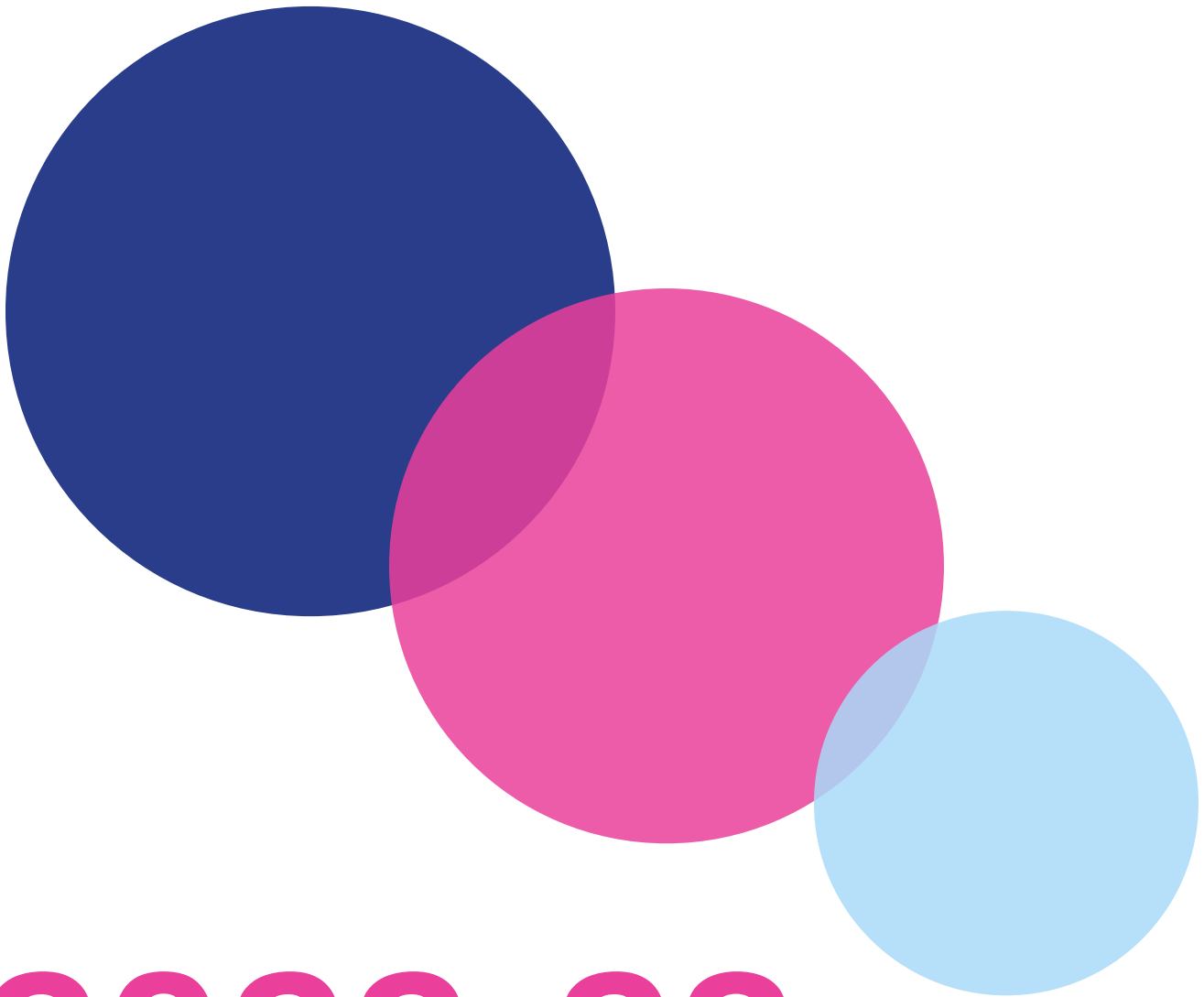




The **Regulation** and
Quality Improvement
Authority



2022-23

**Annual Quality
Report**

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Foreword

This is the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority's (RQIA's) tenth Annual Quality Report, covering the period April 2022 to March 2023. 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. Listening to staff and hearing their experience and concerns adds further insights. All of these help us in cross referencing information from a range of sources including : statistics and data; reports, logs, incidents and registers; what we observe when we are out in inspection and reviews; and the experience of those in receipt of services and staff directly involved in its delivery.

During the year, RQIA's Guidance Team responded to over 3,000 contacts by telephone, email or in writing from families, the public and service providers. Almost one third of these were from service users, relatives and members of the public wishing to discuss queries or concerns about care services. The individual experiences of care adds 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 , set out under the regulation legislation, to challenge poor practice, and to seek improvements.

RQIA continues to strengthen our work by building effective partnerships and collaboration with others: with other statutory organisations, and with professional and systems regulators. Through improving our joined-up approach, there are opportunities for learning, sharing experience and skills, and for improvement through collective approaches.

2022-23 has presented many challenges for health and social care services, which have continued to respond to the legacy and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Throughout this time, we continue to carry out the work of regulation, supporting health and social care providers and staff to achieve and maintain standards and improve quality and safety for both service users and for people working within these vital services.

Briege Donaghy
Chief Executive

Introduction

RQIA's Annual Quality Report 2022-23 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.

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.

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.

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

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.

Transforming the Culture: 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 Social Care, Care Homes and Domiciliary Care
- 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 with each Directorate and with Business Support. These provided the opportunity for detailed reporting against key performance indicators and progress in meeting set objectives for each Directorate.

On a quarterly basis, RQIA's performance against the achievement of strategic objectives is presented to the Authority through an Activity Performance and Outcomes Report, via BARC, for discussion and approval, and 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.

During 2022-23, published its Strategic Plan for the period 2022-28 following a period of public consultation, with some 170 stakeholders engaging in this process, and approval by the Authority in March 2023.

The Strategic Plan includes four strategic objectives:

1. Scrutiny: register, inspect, report and enforce
2. Improve: safety and quality;
3. Build: partnerships to strengthen safety; and
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. During the year, the following areas were audited:

Audit	Level of Assurance Received
Financial Review	Satisfactory
Performance Management	Satisfactory
Authority Effectiveness	Satisfactory
Inspection: Mental Health and Learning Disability	Limited
IT: Cyber Security	Satisfactory

RQIA's response to address the recommendations arising from each audit are shared with Authority Members through ARAC which monitors progress through its meetings, providing assurance to the Authority.

Transforming the Culture: Listening to Service Users, Families and Staff



Listening to and Reflecting Lived Experience

In November 2022, RQIA held a stakeholder event “Listening to and Reflecting Service Users and Families Lived Experience in our RQIA Inspection Reports”, attended by around 50 people. During the event, participants had an opportunity to discuss the role of the Inspection Support Volunteer; improving ways to share inspection findings and reports with families and others; and listening and reflecting lived experience in RQIA’s inspection reports.

All stakeholders who attended this event were also invited to be part of a new Involvement Advisory Network, which aims to involve people with an interest in each of the particular actions to develop, review and evaluate these approaches.

Transforming the Culture: Engaging with the Public

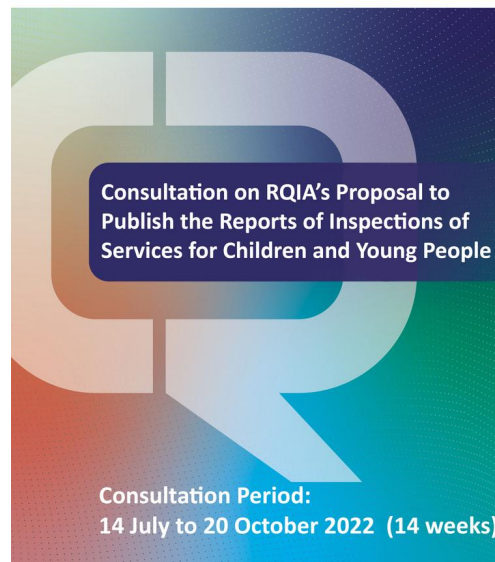
Public Consultations

During 2022-23, RQIA conducted two public consultations, relating to:

- Proposal to Publish RQIA Inspection Reports Relating to Children’s Services
- RQIA’s Draft Strategic Plan 2022-2028

As part of these consultations, RQIA held a series of online and in-person events with a wide range of stakeholders and members of the public to seek their views on these issues.

There was broad agreement with the proposed way forward in the consultation on proposals to publish inspection reports for children’s services. A short-life working group will be established to take this forward, ensuring continued engagement and co-production with children and young person’s representatives. The proposals contained within the draft Strategic Plan also received strong support from consultees, and an updated Strategic Plan, approved by the Authority at its meeting in March 2023 was prepared for publication.

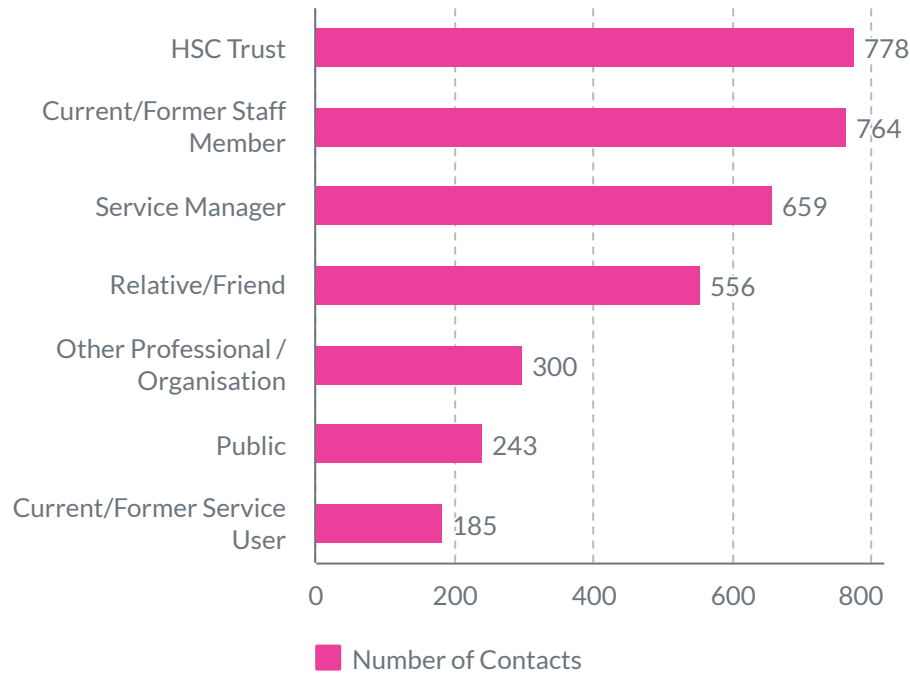


Transforming the Culture: Action on Concerns

Support and Guidance for Service Users, Families and Service Providers

During the year, visiting restrictions in visiting at care services - including hospitals and care homes- continued due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst RQIA inspectors were able to speak with service users and learn first-hand of their experiences, often families were unable to engage directly with RQIA.

However, on a daily basis, RQIA's Guidance Team responded to calls from families, the public and service providers, and during 2022-23 we received almost 3,500 contacts by telephone, email or in writing. While the majority of these contacts were from staff, management and HSC Trusts seeking advice and guidance, RQIA also received almost 1,000 contacts from service users, relatives and members of the public wishing to discuss queries or concerns about care services (see Figure 21). In each case RQIA's Guidance Team determined the nature of the issue or concern, and provided appropriate advice and support. In each case RQIA assessed the matters raised and followed up as required. This included providing advice; following up the issues raised with management of the service; conducting an unannounced inspection to investigate the concerns; or, where necessary, taking enforcement action.



My Home Life; Supporting Leadership Development in Care Homes

Care home managers and staff play a unique role in supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our society. My Home Life, an internationally recognised Leadership Support Programme, is delivered in Northern Ireland by Ulster University, specifically for care home managers and staff in leadership roles. 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, RQIA inspectors have been involved in supporting the delivery of this leadership programme through their attendance and participation in a face-to-face meeting with each of the cohorts through October and November 2022. RQIA will continue its partnership with this programme, and planning has taken place for the new cohorts coming forward in 2023.



RQIA inspectors join cohort of Care Home Managers at My Home Life Leadership Support Programme

Complaints about Health and Social Care Services

One of the most important ways for RQIA to help ensure that care services improve is by listening to the people who use the services or have family and friends who avail of these services. RQIA receives concerns about health and social care services from a range of sources, through telephone calls to our Guidance Team, or emails to our staff. Each concern received is taken seriously, and is carefully considered and assessed to determine if there are any issues that require immediate action by RQIA. In response, RQIA may take a range of actions, from recording the information to help inform our knowledge of a service, following up these concerns with the relevant Health and Social Care Trust, to undertaking an unplanned inspection of the service. RQIA continues to display contact information in care homes and leave contact cards for those who were unable to speak with an Inspector during inspections of various health and social care services.

HOW CAN I
RAISE A CONCERN
ABOUT AN
INDEPENDENT
HEALTH AND
SOCIAL CARE
SERVICE?



www.rqia.org.uk

While RQIA does not have legal powers to investigate complaints about services, RQIA provides contact details for organisations that can support complainants in navigating the health and social care complaints process, including the Patient and Client Council and the Health and Social Care Trusts. Where a complainant is dissatisfied with the service's response to their complaint, they may raise this matter with the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman.

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

Transforming the Culture: Complaints About RQIA

RQIA welcomes contact from people with concerns about its actions or how it conducts its work and considers these as a valuable source of learning for the organisation. The learning from individual complaints is applied to help improve RQIA's systems and processes.

During 2022/2023, 11 complaints were received about RQIA. Complaints were received in relation to a range of matters. These included how RQIA carried out its oversight of health and social care services; contact about RQIA's role in the review of neurology services; registration functions; and complaints about inspection processes.

Learning from individual complaints is applied to help improve our systems and processes. Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with RQIA's response, they are advised of their right to take their complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). RQIA responded to one request for further information from NIPSO, in relation to a complaint about RQIA, which had been subject to investigation earlier in the year.



RQIA Complaints Policy

August 2020

Date Approved by RQIA Board	27 August 2020
Date of Issue	28 August 2020
Date of Review	August 2023

Transforming the Culture: Whistleblowing

Anyone currently working for a health and social care service can make a disclosure to RQIA about a concern or wrongdoing within that service, under The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. This legislation protects workers and details the type of disclosures that may be protected; the circumstances in which such disclosures are protected; and the persons who may be protected.

During the year, RQIA was contacted on 103 occasions by current staff from a range of statutory and independent health and social care settings, who wished to raise concerns (whistleblow) about their workplace. Around one half of these disclosures were from care home staff, while one fifth were from HSC trust services, including mental health services and HSC hospital staff. See table below:

Service Type	% of the Total Received
Registered Services	
Nursing Home	32
Residential Care Homes	19
Domiciliary Care Agency	17
Other Registered Services	10
HSC Services	
Acute HSC Hospital	7
Mental Health and Learning Disability Service	11
Other HSC Service	3

Such information provides RQIA with an invaluable insight into services. The vast majority related to issues around the health and safety of individuals, whilst a small number of disclosures related to alleged fraud, damage to the environment or a breach of legal duty. While some staff wished to remain anonymous, others provided their name and contact details, allowing RQIA to follow up their concerns more fully.

In each case RQIA carefully considered the information to determine what action was required. Where necessary, unannounced inspections were conducted to follow up on concerns, and to drive improvements in quality for those using these services.

Transforming the Culture: Living our Values

As the independent system 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; and
- Working in partnership with others.

Together with the shared HSC values of working together, excellence, openness and honesty, and compassion underpin all RQIA's actions and decisions.

Transforming the Culture: Supporting and Listening to Staff

RQIA currently holds Investors in People Silver accreditation, which demonstrates that RQIA has sustained a purpose-values-driven culture and continues to evolve, creating a strong platform for the future as the organisation continues to adapt, transform and thrive.

In response to the liP findings, RQIA has developed its Recognition and Appreciation Strategy, which sets out RQIA's commitment to recognising and appreciating our employees. During the year three events were held where staff from across the organisation took the opportunity to present achievements.

During March 2023, to coincide with our move to James House, our new permanent accommodation, we launched the RQIA Pilot Hybrid Working Scheme. The Scheme utilises a hybrid working model with the majority of staff opting to work some of their working week in the office and some at home.

The RQIA Health, Safety and Wellbeing Group also continued its work during the year and commenced further development of the RQIA Staff Safety, Health and Wellbeing Programme, to include: Mental Health Wellbeing; Emotional Wellbeing; Physical Wellbeing; and Financial Wellbeing.

Transforming the Culture: Supporting and Listening to Staff

RQIA's inspections of regulated services are undertaken in line with Part III of The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (the 2003 Order) and its associated service-specific regulations and standards.

Under 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, RQIA inspects and has oversight of Mental Health and Learning Disability services; services using ionising radiation treatments; Children's services; and health care in secure settings including prisons and police custody suites.

RQIA's inspection teams comprise experienced nurses, social workers, pharmacists, estates and finance officers, who assess a range of aspects of service provision and delivery.

In advance of every inspection, inspectors review information held on RQIA's i-Connect information management system about that service's regulatory and inspection history. This includes a wide range of intelligence: statutory notifications from the service relating to specific categories of incidents which may have occurred; details of serious concerns or enforcement action; complaints or compliments from service users, their families or advocates; whistleblowing from staff members; information from other statutory organisations such as HSC trusts, the Patient and Client Council, the Commissioners for Older People and for Children and Young People.

During 2022-23 RQIA undertook a total of 1,722 inspections, compared to 1,732 in 2021-22, and 1,549 in 2020-21.

In its inspections of these services, the majority of which are unannounced (79% compared to 67% in 2021-22). 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.

During each inspection we consider the quality of leadership and management within each service, observe practice and review records of care. 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 working at the service. 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.

Where areas of concern were identified, additional inspections were conducted and inspectors met with the service providers. Where it was necessary enforcement action was taken.

Transforming the Culture: Sharing Information

Digital Communication

RQIA's website www.rqia.org.uk is a key mechanism for sharing information about RQIA and its activities with the public, and guidance to support service providers.

Throughout the year, RQIA continued to add new and updated content to its website including inspection reports for independent, voluntary and statutory health and social care services.

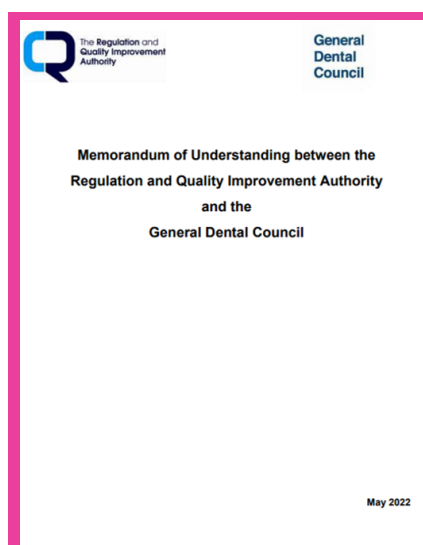
During 2022-23 RQIA received around 200,000 visitors, resulting in over 750,000 webpage views. RQIA's inspection reports continue to be the most visited pages on the website, with over a quarter million page views during the year. Web pages displaying guidance and advice to support providers using Web Portal on RQIA's website were visited over 30,000 times during the year.

RQIA also directs traffic to the website via @RQIANews, the RQIA's Twitter account, where new content added can be notified immediately to over 5,900 followers.

Memoranda of Understanding

During the year, RQIA has established new and updated memoranda of understanding and information sharing protocols with a range of partner organisations, to support information sharing and cooperation in joint working, and transparency when working on areas of common interest. These included:

- The Health and Care Professions Council (April 2022)
- The General Dental Council (May 2022)



Transforming the Culture: Political Engagement

Throughout the year, RQIA continued its engagement with representatives from the main political parties, and during March 2023 RQIA's Chair and Chief Executive met the health spokesperson from each party to discuss the outcome from the public consultation on the draft Strategic Plan, the role of RQIA and specific areas of interest.

Where RQIA undertook significant enforcement actions or held particular concerns about a health and social care service, the Chief Executive spoke directly with local political representatives to ensure they were fully briefed on the issues and on the steps being taken to ensure the ongoing wellbeing and safety of those in receipt of these services.

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.

Strengthening the Workforce: Investors in People

In the previous year, 2021-22, RQIA underwent its Investors in People (IiP) re-accreditation and increased its level of award to Silver. The IiP Assessor commented that this increased award demonstrated that RQIA has sustained a purpose-values-driven culture and continues to evolve, creating a strong platform for the future as the organisation continues to adapt, transform and thrive.

RQIA has developed its Recognition and Appreciation Strategy in response to the IiP findings. The overall aim of the Strategy and accompanying Delivery Plan is to recognise and value our staff who are our primary asset in delivering our objectives. Three staff events, held during 2022-23 gave opportunities for various teams to present their work, with a focus on quality improvement initiatives.

Strengthening the Workforce: RQIA Staff Profile

The RQIA's staff are its most valuable asset and responsible for the achievement of corporate objectives and the effective delivery of the work programme. During 2022-23 there was an average permanent headcount of 131 staff in post (123.84 whole time equivalent), excluding Authority Members, bank and agency staff. The staff composition, by headcount, is 74% female and 26% male. During 2022-23, there was an average staff absence rate of 4.10% against a regional key performance indicator of 6.18%, set for RQIA by DoH.

During 2022-23, there was a staff turnover of 12.74%, with 15 members of staff leaving RQIA through retirement or taking up new opportunities. At year end RQIA had 11 substantive posts which were vacant as part of routine staff turnover. During the year 32 new staff joined teams inspecting care homes, independent health care, hospitals and mental health and learning disability wards and business support roles.

RQIA staff continued to follow government guidance, working in a hybrid manner including both working from home and in the office.

Strengthening the Workforce: Staff Policies

RQIA has a range of policies to support both the organisation and its staff in conducting their work. These include HR, ICT and information governance policies, which are reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Throughout the year, organisational learning development activities continued to ensure staff were equipped to deliver against the objectives within RQIA's Business Plan. This included a range of mandatory and job-specific training for staff across RQIA.

Strengthening the Workforce: Staff Training

RQIA is committed to supporting and developing its staff, and we ensure that staff have access to training opportunities to enable them to contribute fully to achieving RQIA's organisational objectives. In addition to job-specific training, during the year, all staff undertook mandatory training on:

- Cyber Security Awareness
- Display Screen Equipment Awareness
- Engage and Involve: Personal and Public Involvement;
- Fire Safety Awareness
- Fraud Awareness
- Infection Prevention and Control (Tier 1)
- Information Governance Awareness
- Risk Management Awareness



RQIA staff have also been asked to complete eight cyber security campaigns up to the end of March 2023, as part of the Regional HSC Cyber Awareness Campaign. Campaigns have included topics such as: Phishing Security; Remote Working; Password Security; Device Security; Cyber Awareness; Email Essentials; and Data Security.

A Staff Training and Development Calendar was developed over the year, with a plan to launch in April 2023, providing easy to access information for staff, covering details for Mandatory Training Modules, as well as other themed areas, to include:

- Understanding Human Resources Policy and Procedures
- Mental Capacity Act and the Mental Health Order 1986
- Safeguarding
- Human Rights.

At year end RQIA achieved 100% levels for all mandatory training.

Strengthening the Workforce: Well Being

The RQIA Health, Safety and Wellbeing Group also continued its work during 2022-23 and commenced further development of the RQIA Staff Safety, Health and Wellbeing Programme, to include: Mental Health Wellbeing; Emotional Wellbeing; Physical Wellbeing; and Financial Wellbeing.

Strengthening the Workforce: Social, Community and Environmental Matters

RQIA manages all sickness absence in line with its attendance management policy and associated procedures.

During March 2023, to coincide with our move to James House, our new permanent accommodation, we launched the RQIA Pilot Hybrid Working Scheme. The Scheme utilises a hybrid working model with the majority of staff opting to work some of their working week in the office and some at home.

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.

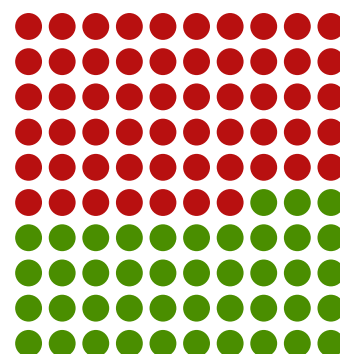
Measuring the Improvement: Regulation of Services

Registration and Inspection of Health and Social Care Services

1,722 Inspections conducted by RQIA during 2022-23



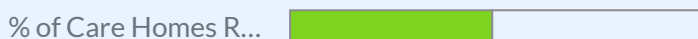
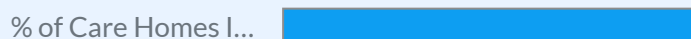
79% of Inspections were unannounced
21% of Inspections were announced



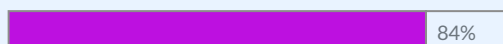
43% of inspections resulted in no requirements or recommendations for improvement

Care Homes

100% of all operational care homes were inspected
49% had received the statutory minimum of inspections (2+)



Domiciliary Care Agencies, Nursing Agencies, Adult Placement Agencies & Day Care Settings



84% of these services inspected at least once

13

Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations (IR(ME)R) Inspections conducted



9 Acute Hospitals inspected

Registration

1,555 services were registered with RQIA

1,829 registration applications were received

202



out of hours inspections took place at nursing, residential care and children's homes

Children's Homes

100% inspected at least once
63% received the statutory required minimum inspections (2+)



Mental Health (NI) Order 1986

During the year, RQIA reviewed **8,104** assessments forms and **1,106** detention forms

Mental Health and Learning Disability

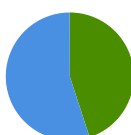
48% of Mental Health and Learning Disability Wards inspected at least once



Concerns

3382

contacts/concerns were recorded and individually case managed



45% of these calls related to Nursing and Residential Care Homes

How We Inspect

Using its powers under Article 35 of the 2003 Order, and in response to current events, or to examine emerging issues, RQIA may conduct reviews of health and social care services. These may be initiated by RQIA or commissioned by the Department of Health or another HSC organisation. In planning reviews and reporting on the findings, RQIA focuses on safe, effective and compassionate care; and on the quality of leadership within a service.

The purpose of the review programme is to provide independent and professional assessments to the Minister, 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. It also aims to drive continuous improvement in these services and to ensure the rights of service users are safeguarded.

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 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.

Expert Review of Records of Deceased Patients (Neurology)

In May 2018, Belfast HSC Trust announced a recall of 2,500 patients following concerns raised regarding the clinical practice of Dr Watt, a consultant neurologist employed by the Belfast Trust. The Department of Health's Permanent Secretary established an Independent Neurology Inquiry, chaired by Brett Lockhart KC, subsequently converted to a Statutory Public Inquiry in December 2020.

The Permanent Secretary also directed RQIA to:

- undertake a review of governance arrangements of outpatient services in the Belfast HSC Trust, with a focus on neurology and other high volume specialties (published in February 2020)
- review governance arrangements in independent hospitals and hospices in Northern Ireland, as Dr Watt practised in several independent hospitals (published in June 2021)
- commission an expert review of the records of all patients or former patients of the consultant neurologist, who had died over the previous ten years.

RQIA commissioned the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) in August 2021 to undertake an expert review of the clinical records of certain deceased patients who had been under the care of Dr Watt, to understand his clinical practice, to ensure learning for others and to help make care better and safer in the future. Much has been learned through the review of records, and this has been greatly enriched by the direct involvement of the deceased patients' families.

The RCP's Expert Panel found significant failures in the care and treatment of patients, and highlighted concerns over clinical decision-making, diagnostic approach, communications with other clinicians, and poor communication with patients and with families.

RQIA commended the courage and openness of all those families who came forward to engage in this Review. Their accounts starkly illustrate how failings by an individual practitioner, and by the system, led to deep human impacts and resulting harm, both to the deceased patients and to their bereaved families.

As Northern Ireland's independent regulator for health and social care, RQIA is committed to using its role and powers to ensure that the recommendations within this report are implemented. RQIA is also determined that the actions it takes, driven by the findings from this Review, will improve clinical practice, the safety of services and the experience of patients and of families.

RQIA Review of the Implementation of Recommendations to Prevent Choking Incidents Across Northern Ireland

In May 2022, RQIA published its independent review of the implementation of recommendations to prevent choking incidents in Northern Ireland.

This focused on work undertaken in high-risk areas across health and social care (including: stroke care; care of the elderly; and services for those with physical, mental health or learning disabilities), and examined the measures and governance arrangements in place to prevent choking, in line with current guidance.

RQIA noted that between 2016 and 2021 there had been 21 deaths from choking. In February 2021 a Best Practice Guidance Letter was issued to improve the safety of care for people who are at risk of choking, however, since then, there had been a further 10 deaths from choking across Northern Ireland. The review found that there was a clear and urgent need to improve the quality and safety of care provided to people at risk of choking.

The key recommendations in the review included: training for staff including clinicians, catering and domestic teams; shorter waiting times for assessment by speech and language therapy; better systems for communication between staff, and safer systems for ordering and storing food.

RQIA noted that people with difficulty in eating, drinking, and swallowing suffer both from a reduced quality of life and real risk of harm including, tragically, loss of life. The vast majority of those who die from choking are known to have a swallowing difficulty. Many already have a care plan in place, however, choking incidents may occur due to failures in communication of the care plan, and when people are inadvertently provided with, or are able to access, food and drink that is not suitable or safe for them. They and their families and carers must receive good quality guidance, along with practical support, to ensure their safety and a good quality of life.

The Review examined how the guidance is being implemented and made 12 recommendations, which if fully implemented, will ensure better outcomes for people living with eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties and should see a reduction in choking-related harm. RQIA will work with the Trusts and others to make sure that this guidance, is implemented where it matters, on the ground.

The review was welcomed by the Department of Health's Chief Allied Health Professions Officer, who said: "The Department of Health is committed to working with the RQIA, HSC Trusts and providers of health and social care to support improvement, and to ensure better and safer outcomes for people at risk of choking."

RQIA Review of the Systems and Processes for Learning from Serious Adverse Incidents in Northern Ireland

Serious Adverse Incident reviews are intended to be a fundamental part of how Northern Ireland's health and social care system learns and improves, by openly discovering what happened in events where harm occurs; identifying remedial measures, and communicating these across the region so improving safety.

Regional Guidance for the reporting and follow-up of SAIs, issued by the Department of Health, has been in place since 2004. The SAI process, its implementation, and its effectiveness in identifying causes of harm, and improving safety has come under close scrutiny in recent years.

In July 2022, RQIA published its report on the Systems and Processes for Learning from Serious Adverse Incidents in Northern Ireland. This review was commissioned by the Department of Health in response to the recommendations of the Inquiry into Hyponatremia, to assess the effectiveness of the current SAI process. It was conducted by an Expert Panel, including patient and service user representation; with input from families impacted by SAI events and their subsequent review. During the review RQIA engaged with a wide range of individuals, organisations and groups from across the HSC system.

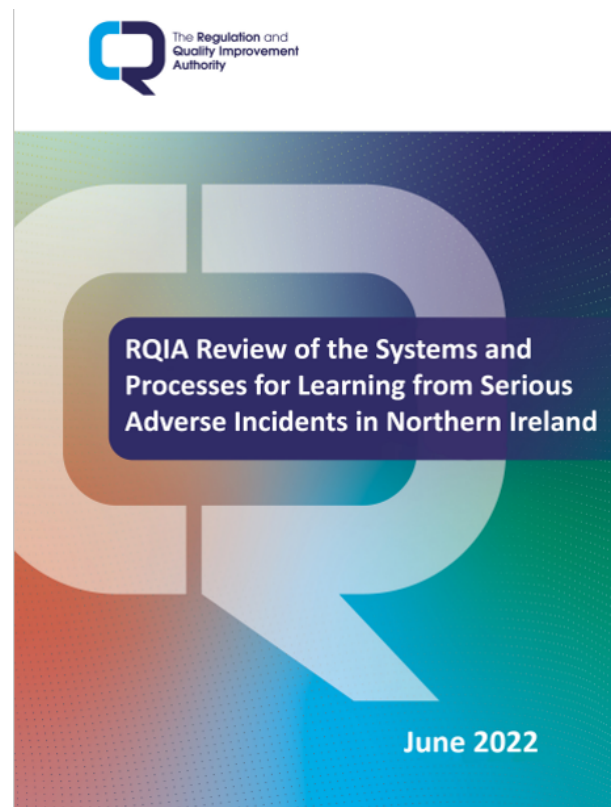
The Expert Review Team concluded that the current system for investigating and learning from SAIs in Northern Ireland is failing to deliver on its intended purpose, of discovering what went wrong; identifying remedial measures; and ensuring that these are applied across the region.

This Review made five strategic recommendations, aimed at securing major changes in how SAI reviews are conducted; and how findings and learning are communicated and put into action across the whole health and social care system.

Implementing these five recommendations requires both a concerted commitment to the redesign of the regional procedure, and to changing how it is applied on the ground. This demands a new approach, embedding the principles of just culture and the effective involvement of patients and their families, into the health and social care system at every level.

HSC leaders and managers must work to make sure that if something goes wrong, all staff are confident to speak up and supported to participate fully in the SAI review process, knowing that doing so will help them keep their patients and service users safe and improve the quality of care they are able to deliver.

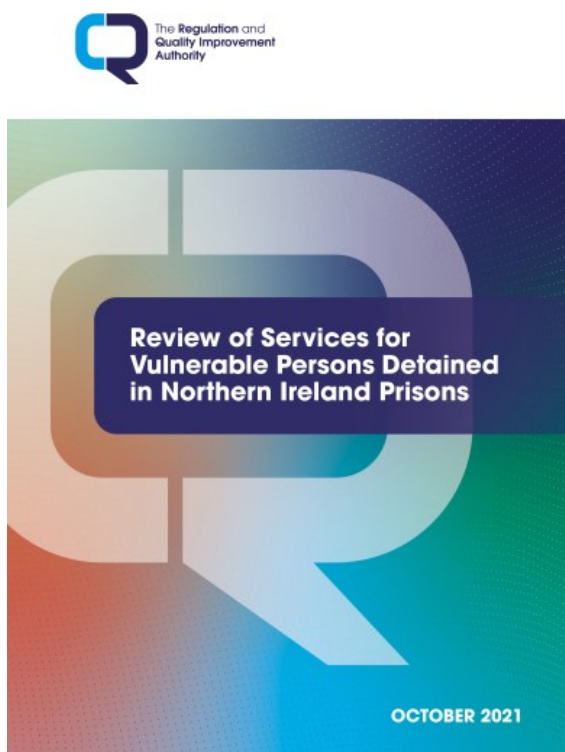
Patients and service users, and their loved ones and advocates, must also be able to participate fully in the process, so they find out what happened and can help make sure it won't happen again.



Other Review Activity

In June 2022, members of RQIA's Review team attended the International Association of Forensic Mental Health Services (IAFMHS) Conference in Berlin, Innovations and Resilience through Adversity: Advances in Forensic Mental Health Assessment and Treatment. RQIA presented the findings of its Review of Services for Vulnerable Persons Detained in Northern Ireland Prisons (October 2021), which highlighted the need for a government-led strategy to improve the quality and accessibility of mental health services in order to reduce the risk of self-harm and suicide within the prison population.

During the year, RQIA completed its Review of the governance arrangements in place to support safety within Maternity Services in Northern Ireland, to be published in early 2023-24.



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.

Raising the Standards: RQIA Clinical Audit, Guidelines and Quality Improvement Programme

RQIA is committed to promoting leadership in safety and quality in HSC sector to ensure that the outcomes for patients, clients and carers are improved through the implementation of audits and QI projects. During 2021-22, RQIA provided funding to a number of HSC organisations to undertake clinical audits and QI projects, which were completed in March 2023. These were:

- Thyroid Eye Disease National Quality Improvement Project
- Streamlining Urology Multidisciplinary Meetings
- Rapid Exome Sequencing for Unwell Neonates;
- Patient engagement through the use of Digital Reminiscence Therapy (RITA)

Raising the Standards: Public Involvement in RQIA 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. 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 pandemic it was challenging for RQIA to involve lay assessors in on the ground inspection and review activities. However, to ensure RQIA is best placed to reinvigorate involvement as we emerge from the pandemic, we focused on developing the Inspector Support Volunteer role (previously Lay Assessor).

Prior to launching this role, we formed a Task and Finish group to create a robust system to support the new Inspector Support Volunteers, developing on-boarding processes, induction and training. We engaged with Volunteer Now and University of Ulster in the development of the processes, and launched the recruitment exercise in late March 2023. We anticipate piloting this role in our care homes inspections during 2023-24.

Other projects have included the development of a range of accessible questionnaires to support feedback on the quality of care during inspections, developed in partnership with services and service users.



During discussions with service providers, RQIA staff, the Alzheimer's Society (Advocacy Group) and Age NI (Carers and Service Users), RQIA considered that the Service User questionnaire used within dementia care settings needed to be improved in order to support meaningful engagement and more effectively capture the lived experience of people in receipt of care services. As part of an engagement process with service providers, including supported living and day care settings, a revised 'dementia friendly' questionnaire was piloted by RQIA's Agencies Team. Service user feedback to was very positive, and during 2023-24 the findings from this pilot will help inform ongoing inspection methodology within dementia care settings.

A project was also undertaken by the RQIA Agencies Team to develop an evidence based, 'easy read' service user questionnaire for use during inspections within learning disability care settings.

RQIA engaged and involved service users and other stakeholders in the co-design of this questionnaire, which was then reviewed with the ARC TILLI service user group who facilitated any required changes. Feedback was received from 450 service users and this approach has helped to facilitate a more cooperative relationship with service users which can be maintained and developed. The project has also helped to empower service users to influence and more actively engage in the inspection process.

In partnership with the Public Health Agency, we co-produced a Dysphagia checklist for RQIA inspectors, which will be introduced during 2023-24.

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.

Integrating the Care: Partnership Working

RQIA is committed to building and strengthening effective partnerships with health and social care systems regulators, inspectorates and professional regulatory bodies across the UK and Ireland, to share best practice and benchmark its work. These included the Care Quality Commission; Care Inspectorate Scotland; Health Inspectorate Wales; the Health Information and Quality Authority; the Health Care Professionals Council, Professional Standards Authority; The General Medical Council, General Dental Council; Nursing and Midwifery Council; and the Health and Safety Executive.

RQIA shares best practice through its engagement with the Regional Medical Imaging Board, UK wide groups including the IR(ME)R Four Nations Group; Radiological Safety Working Group; and the Medical Radiation Liaison Group.

In addition, RQIA works closely with other bodies including:

- Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland;
- Education and Training Inspectorate;
- Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons;
- The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland;
- The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI); and
- The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).

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

- Independent Health and Care Providers (IHCP);
- UK Homecare Association;
- The Royal Colleges of Nursing, General Practitioners, and Psychiatrists;
- British Dental Association; and
- Association for Real Change, particularly in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on services.



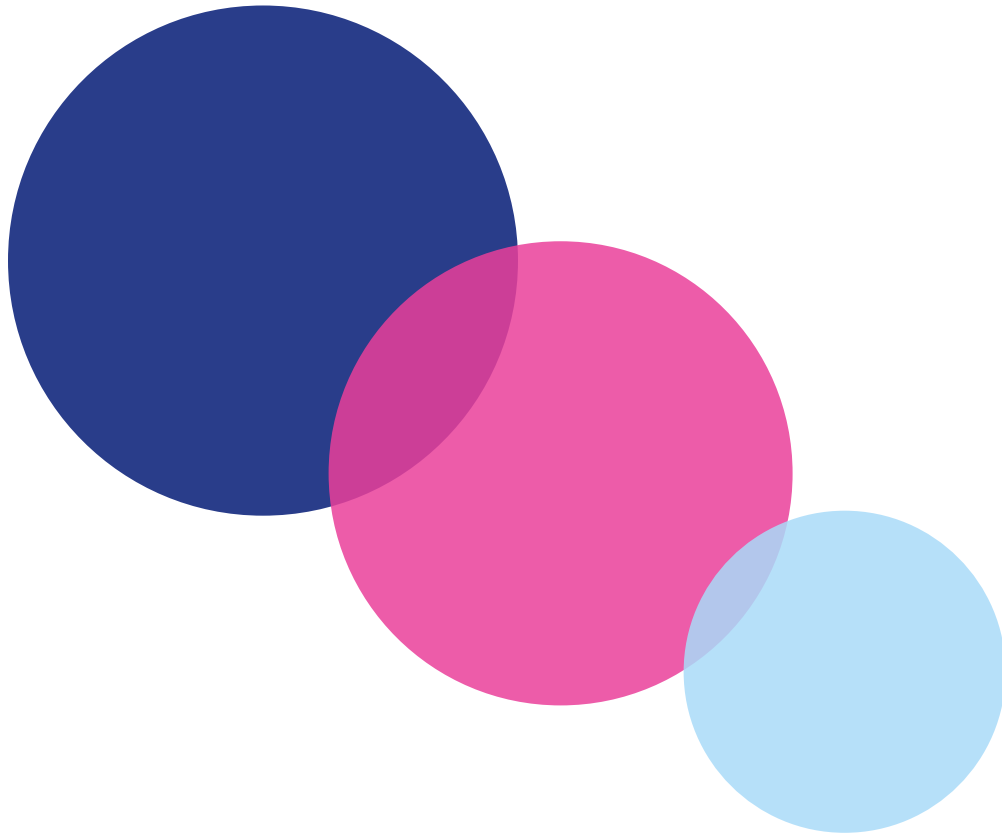
Briege Donaghy, RQIA Chief Executive meets Dr Colin Sullivan Chief Executive, Human Tissue Authority (left) and Ian Trenholm, Chief Executive, Care Quality Commission (CQC) (above)

Learning from the Covid-19 Pandemic

During 2022-23, RQIA continued to play a key role in the regional response to the Covid-19 pandemic, working closely with and supporting statutory and independent partners across health and social care.

On behalf of the wider HSC, RQIA coordinated the daily Covid-19 status returns from nursing and residential care homes, reported via the online provider web portal. This information helped to inform the Department of Health, Public Health Agency and the Strategic Planning and Performance Group and trusts of the current situation within this sector. It also helped RQIA in focusing its attention on those services requiring particular support and attention.

RQIA also prepared information for the Covid-19 Public Inquiry on RQIA's role in health and social care during the pandemic.



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