

**Nursing and Midwifery Council  
Fitness to Practise Committee**

**Substantive Meeting  
Friday, 19 June 2026**

Virtual Meeting

**Name of Registrant:** Rufus Ogbonna Onya

**NMC PIN:** 23B1563E

**Part(s) of the register:** Nurses part of the register Sub part 1  
RNMH: Mental health nurse, level 1

**Relevant Location:** East London

**Type of case:** Conviction

**Panel members:** Angela Kell (Chair, lay member)  
Vickie Glass (Registrant member)  
Jan Bilton (Lay member)

**Legal Assessor:** Ian Ashford-Thom

**Hearings Coordinator:** Tyra Andrews

**Facts proved:** Charges 1 and 2

**Facts not proved:** Not applicable

**Fitness to practise:** Impaired

**Sanction:** **Striking-off order**

**Interim order:** **Interim suspension order (18 months)**

## **Decision and reasons on service of Notice of Meeting**

The panel had sight of the 'find a prisoner disclosure request form' completed by the NMC and the response advising the establishment Mr Onya is currently held in. The panel noted that the Notice of Meeting had been sent to Mr Onya's confirmed address by recorded delivery and by first class post on 15 May 2026.

The panel accepted the advice of the legal assessor.

The panel took into account that the Notice of Meeting provided details of the allegations, the opportunity to respond to them and make submissions to the panel in advance of the substantive meeting which was due to take place on or after 15 June 2026.

In the light of all of the information available, the panel was satisfied that Mr Onya has been served with notice of this meeting in accordance with the requirements of Rules 11A and 34 of the 'Nursing and Midwifery Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2004', as amended (the Rules).

## **Details of charge**

That you, a registered nurse:

1. Were convicted on 21 July 2025 at Carlilse Crown Court, of possess with intent to supply a controlled drug of Class A – Cocaine, contrary to section 5 (3) of and Schedule 4 (1) to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.
2. Were convicted on 17 May 2025 at Medway Magistrates Court of arrest by a constable for breaking/likely to break bail conditions duty to surrender into the custody of a court, contrary to section 7 (3) (b), (4) and (5) of the Bail Act 1976.

AND in light of the above, your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your conviction.

## **Background**

On 2 September 2024 the NMC received a referral from Cumbria Police to advise that on 22 August 2024 a vehicle driven by Mr Onya was stopped on the south bound carriageway of the M6 motorway near Penrith.

There was a search conducted of the vehicle under section 23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 in which they found around three kilograms of a controlled drug of Class A drugs in the boot of the vehicle.

On 23 August 2024 Mr Onya was remanded in custody. Mr Onya appeared at Carlisle Crown Court on 20 September 2024 whereby he pled not guilty. Mr Onya was granted bail with conditions to live and sleep at his home address and stay inside his home address from the hours of 20:00 – 06:00.

Mr Onya was convicted of possession with intent to supply a controlled drug of Class A - Cocaine in Carlisle Crown Court on 21 July 2025 and was remanded in custody. Mr Onya was also convicted of breaching his bail conditions.

On 22 August 2025 Mr Onya was sentenced to 8 years in prison.

## **Decision and reasons on facts**

The panel had regard to the evidence bundle provided by the NMC in relation to this matter. Before making its findings on facts, the panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal assessor.

The charges concern Mr Onya's conviction and, having been provided with a copy of the certificates of conviction dated 17 May 2025 and 21 July 2025, the panel finds that the facts are found proved in accordance with Rule 31 (2) and (3). These state:

*'31.— (2) Where a registrant has been convicted of a criminal offence—*

- (a) *a copy of the certificate of conviction, certified by a competent officer of a Court in the United Kingdom (or, in Scotland, an extract conviction) shall be conclusive proof of the conviction; and*
  - (b) *the findings of fact upon which the conviction is based shall be admissible as proof of those facts.*
- (3) *The only evidence which may be adduced by the registrant in rebuttal of a conviction certified or extracted in accordance with paragraph (2)(a) is evidence for the purpose of proving that she is not the person referred to in the certificate or extract.'*

### **Fitness to practise**

Having announced its findings on the facts, the panel then considered whether, on the basis of the facts found proved, Mr Onya's fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of his convictions. There is no statutory definition of fitness to practise. However, the NMC has defined fitness to practise as a registrant's suitability to remain on the register unrestricted.

### **Decision and reasons on impairment**

The NMC requires the panel to bear in mind its overarching objective to protect the public and the wider public interest. This includes the need to declare and maintain proper standards and maintain public confidence in the profession and in the NMC as a regulatory body. The panel has referred to the cases of *Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence v (1) Nursing and Midwifery Council (2) Grant* [2011] EWHC 927 (Admin).

The panel accepted the advice of the legal assessor.

The panel next went on to decide if as a result of the conviction, Mr Onya's fitness to practise is currently impaired.

In coming to its decision, the panel had regard to the NMC Guidance on '*Impairment*' (Reference: DMA-1 Last Updated:28/01/2026) in which the following is stated:

*'Being fit to practise is not defined in our legislation but for us it means that a professional on our register can practise as a nurse midwife or nursing associate safely and effectively without restriction.'*

Nurses occupy a position of privilege and trust in society and are expected at all times to be professional. Patients and their families must be able to trust nurses with their lives and the lives of their loved ones. To justify that trust, nurses must act with integrity. They must make sure that their conduct at all times justifies both their patients' and the public's trust in the profession.

In this regard the panel considered the judgment of Mrs Justice Cox in the case of *CHRE v NMC and Grant* in reaching its decision. In paragraph 74, she said:

*'In determining whether a practitioner's fitness to practise is impaired by reason of misconduct, the relevant panel should generally consider not only whether the practitioner continues to present a risk to members of the public in his or her current role, but also whether the need to uphold proper professional standards and public confidence in the profession would be undermined if a finding of impairment were not made in the particular circumstances.'*

In paragraph 76, Mrs Justice Cox referred to Dame Janet Smith's "test" which reads as follows:

*'Do our findings of fact in respect of the doctor's misconduct, deficient professional performance, adverse health, conviction, caution or determination show that his/her/their fitness to practise is impaired in the sense that S/He/They:*

- a) has in the past acted and/or is liable in the future to act so as to put a patient or patients at unwarranted risk of harm; and/or*

- b) has in the past brought and/or is liable in the future to bring the medical profession into disrepute; and/or*
  
- c) has in the past breached and/or is liable in the future to breach one of the fundamental tenets of the medical profession; and/or...'*

The panel had regard to the following sentencing remarks made by Judge Fanning dated 22 August 2025:

*'The officer found three kilos of cocaine in his car with a potential street value of up to £300,000. When his house was searched the same day, £5,760 in cash was found under the bed; £1,000 of it was in Scottish notes...'*

In consideration of the evidence before it, the panel noted that Mr Onya's conduct in the charges found proved occurred outside of his nursing practice and did not put patients at risk. However, the panel found that Mr Onya had breached the fundamental tenets of the nursing profession and therefore brought its reputation into disrepute. The panel were of the view that drug related offences are serious and this one particularly so given the quantity of class A drugs involved, the potential for harm to the public associated with this and the sentence imposed. The panel noted that a serious drug related offence is listed as a specified offence in the NMC guidance FTP2c (last updated 27/02/2024).

The panel also had regard to the following statement made by Judge Fanning:

*'A lot of the people that you would have been helping with your mental health nurse hat on are damaged by drugs, and the sentences that are imposed to those who involve themselves in couriating drugs and dealing in drugs are very significant for a reason.'*

The panel was satisfied that confidence in the nursing profession would be undermined if its regulator did not find charges relating to drug possession and intent to distribute extremely serious.

The panel bore in mind that the overarching objectives of the NMC are to protect, promote and maintain the health safety and well-being of the public and patients, and to uphold/protect the wider public interest, which includes promoting and maintaining public confidence in the nursing and midwifery professions and upholding the proper professional standards for members of those professions.

The panel determined that, in this case, a finding of impairment on public interest grounds is required. The panel found that Mr Onya's conduct raises concerns regarding his attitude and gives rise to deep-seated attitudinal concerns that are not in line with what is expected of a registered nurse. The panel determined that a member of the public would be concerned to know that a finding of impairment is not found regarding a registrant with a conviction concerning Class-A drug possession and intent to distribute. The panel determined that a finding of impairment is necessary on public interest grounds to uphold the confidence in the nursing profession.

Having regard to all of the above, the panel was satisfied that Mr Onya's fitness to practise is currently impaired.

### **Sanction**

The panel has considered this case very carefully and has decided to make a striking-off order. It directs the registrar to strike Mr Onya off the register. The effect of this order is that the NMC register will show that Mr Onya has been struck-off the register.

In reaching this decision, the panel has had regard to all the evidence that has been adduced in this case and had regard to the NMC Guidance on '*The sanctions available*' (Reference: SAN-2 Last Updated: 28/01/2026).

The panel accepted the advice of the legal assessor.

### **Decision and reasons on sanction**

The panel noted that in the Notice of Meeting, dated 15 May 2026, the NMC had advised Mr Onya that it would seek the imposition of a striking off order if it found Mr Onya's fitness to practise currently impaired.

Having found Mr Onya's fitness to practise currently impaired, the panel went on to consider what sanction, if any, it should impose. The panel has borne in mind that any sanction imposed must be appropriate and proportionate and, although not intended to be punitive in its effect, may have such consequences. The panel had regard to the NMC Guidance on '*The sanctions available*' (Reference: SAN-2 Last Updated: 28/01/2026). The decision on sanction is a matter for the panel independently exercising its own judgement.

The panel took into account the following aggravating features:

- Absence of or limited insight.
- Premeditated behaviour.

The panel noted the mitigating factor relating to the conviction identified by Judge Fanning namely that Mr Onya had no previous convictions. However, it was of the view that in relation to mitigation regarding these proceedings, Mr Onya has not engaged with the NMC and therefore there is no evidence of any mitigation in relation to his nursing practice.

The panel first considered whether to take no action but concluded that this would be inappropriate in view of the seriousness of the case. The panel decided that it would be neither proportionate nor in the public interest to take no further action.

The panel next considered a caution order and had regard to the NMC Guidance on '*Caution order*' (Reference: SAN-2b Last Updated: 28/01/2026) in which the following is stated:

*'A caution is only appropriate if the Committee has decided there's no risk to the public or to people using services that requires the professional's practice to be restricted. This means the case is at the lower end of the spectrum of impaired*

*fitness to practise, but the Committee wants to mark that what happened was unacceptable and must not happen again.'*

The panel considered that Mr Onya's misconduct was not at the lower end of the spectrum. The panel also determined that it would be neither proportionate nor in the public interest to impose a caution order.

The panel next considered whether to place a conditions of practice order on Mr Onya registration. In considering whether conditions of practice order is appropriate, the panel had regard to the factors set out in the NMC Guidance on 'Conditions of practice order' (Reference: SAN-2c Last Updated: 28/01/2026). Having found that there are attitudinal concerns related to the nature of Mr Onya's conviction and having regard to the nature and seriousness of the charges found proved, the panel determined that a conditions of practice order would not be appropriate in the circumstances. The panel noted that concerns regarding Mr Onya's clinical practice have not been raised and he is currently serving a prison sentence. The panel therefore considered that there are no relevant, proportionate, workable or measurable conditions that could be formulated to satisfy the public interest and uphold professional standards.

The panel went on to consider whether a suspension order is appropriate in this case. The panel had regard to the NMC Guidance on '*Suspension order*' (Reference: SAN-2d Last Updated: 28/01/2026) in which the following factors on when a suspension order may be appropriate are set out:

- *'the impairment is very serious but not fundamentally incompatible with continuing to be a registered professional'*
- *'an outcome less severe than strike-off would still satisfy the over-arching objective.'*

The panel also had regard to the key considerations as set out in the NMC Guidance to weigh up before imposing a suspension. It noted the following list of circumstances that may make a suspension order an appropriate sanction:

- *'the charges found proved are at the most serious end of the spectrum and call into question the professional's suitability to continue practising, either currently or at all'*

- *while it is possible that the professional could be fit to practise in future, only a period out of practice would be sufficient to allow them to fully strengthen their practice through reflection, the development of their professional skills and / or development of insight and remediation*
- *there is a risk to the safety of people using services if the professional were allowed to continue to practise even with conditions*
- *what went wrong is so serious that public confidence in the profession and professional standards could not be maintained if the professional were able to continue practising without stopping for a period of time*
- *despite the seriousness of what happened, the professional has engaged in the proceedings and has shown at least some meaningful insight which evidences a realistic possibility that they will continue to develop this insight, address their concerns and return to practice.'*

Whilst the panel acknowledged that the risks identified could be managed by Mr Onya being temporarily removed from the Register, it considered that it would not be sufficient to uphold public confidence in the profession and maintain professional standards due to the seriousness and nature of the facts found proved. Mr Onya has not engaged with the NMC. In any event, the panel noted that Mr Onya is serving a long custodial sentence, and was of the view that there is no amount of remediation that would give rise to a realistic possibility that he could address the concerns to such a level where he could return to practise without risking reputational damage to the nursing profession and the NMC as its regulator.

In this particular case, the panel determined that a suspension order would not be a sufficient, appropriate or proportionate sanction.

In considering a striking-off order, the panel had regard to the NMC Guidance on 'Sanctions for the highest risk cases' (Reference SAN-4 Last Updated: 28/01/2026).

*'There are some offences we have specified as particularly serious because they raise fundamental questions about the professional's ability to uphold the standards and values set out in the code. If a registrant has been convicted of one of these offences, it is unlikely that any sanction less than strike-off will be appropriate. This*

*is because we do not consider that public confidence could be maintained in the profession if they remained on the register. However, the Committee will still need to consider the facts of the individual case.'*

The panel considered the offence relating to the possession and intent to distribute Class-A drugs and determined that this case falls within the definition of being a 'highest risk case' due to being a specified offence as set out in NMC Guidance FtP-2c.

The panel had regard to the following considerations as set out in the NMC Guidance entitled 'Striking-off order' (Reference: SAN-2e Last Updated; 28/01/2026):

- *Do the charges found proved raise fundamental questions about their professionalism?*
- *Can public confidence in the profession be maintained if the professional is not removed from the Register?*
- *Is there any amount of insight and reflection which could keep people receiving care and members of the public safe, maintain public confidence in the profession, and uphold professional standards?*
- *Is there a realistic prospect that, after suspension, the professional will have gained insight and strengthened their practice such that the risk they pose will have reduced?*

The panel found that the charges found proved are fundamentally incompatible with Mr Onya remaining on the Register. In consideration of the evidence before it, the panel were not satisfied that public confidence in the professional could be maintained if Mr Onya remained on the Register. The panel noted that there is no evidence before it to suggest that Mr Onya engaged with the NMC, and it understood that he is currently serving a prison sentence. The panel determined that there is no realistic possibility that Mr Onya could address the concerns to such a level where he could return to practise without risking reputational damage to the nursing profession and the NMC as its regulator.

The panel was of the view that the findings in this particular case demonstrate that Mr Onya's actions were so serious that to allow him to continue practising would undermine public confidence in the profession and in the NMC as a regulatory body.

Balancing all of these factors and after taking into account all the evidence before it during this case, the panel determined that the appropriate and proportionate sanction is that of a striking-off order. Having regard to the matters it identified, in particular the effect of Mr Onya's actions in bringing the profession into disrepute by adversely affecting the public's view of how a registered nurse should conduct himself, the panel has concluded that nothing short of this would be sufficient.

The panel considered that a striking off order was necessary to mark the importance of maintaining public confidence in the profession, and to send to the public and the profession a clear message about the standard of behaviour required of a registered nurse.

This will be confirmed to Mr Onya in writing.

### **Interim order**

As the striking-off order cannot take effect until the end of the 28-day appeal period, the panel has considered whether an interim order is required in the specific circumstances of this case. It may only make an interim order if it is satisfied that it is necessary for the protection of the public, is otherwise in the public interest or in Mr Onya's own interests until the striking-off sanction takes effect.

The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal assessor.

### **Decision and reasons on interim order**

The panel was satisfied that an interim order is necessary in the public interest. The panel had regard to the seriousness of the facts found proved and the reasons set out in its decision for the substantive order in reaching the decision to impose an interim order.

The panel also had regard to NMC guidance SAN-6 and noted the example provided however, the panel decided that an interim order is necessary in this case due to the

potential reputational impact and the need to maintain confidence in the profession and the regulatory process.

Furthermore, the panel were conscious of the risk of Mr Onya making an appeal against the conviction and the risk of a potential early release from prison.

The panel concluded that an interim conditions of practice order would not be appropriate or proportionate in this case, due to the reasons already identified in the panel's determination for imposing the substantive order. The panel therefore imposed an interim suspension order for a period of 18 months to cover the statutory appeal period of 28 days and the period any appeal may take.

If no appeal is made, then the interim suspension order will be replaced by the substantive striking off order 28 days after Mr Onya is sent the decision of this hearing in writing.

That concludes this determination.