

The RCN mentorship programme

Strengthening working partnerships



RCN mentorship resources

Strengthening working partnerships is the sixth part of the RCN mentorship resources. The complete list of RCN mentorship resources available is below.

1. An overview of the RCN mentoring framework
2. RCN mentoring relationship standards
3. The RCN mentorship development programme
4. Lifelong learning in practice – achieving practice standards
5. The mentorship contract and toolkit
- 6. Strengthening working partnerships**
7. RCN representatives' practice standards
8. Mentor and mentee relationship standards

Foreword



I'm delighted to introduce you to the RCN mentorship programme for representatives, a new and innovative scheme that aims to develop and maintain excellent standards of practice amongst all RCN representatives.

As an employer you will be aware that RCN stewards, safety representatives and learning representatives have first hand knowledge of nursing issues and concerns in the workplace. They provide a direct link to your nursing workforce and are trained to work in partnership with employers, with the shared aim of improving patient and client care.

Mentoring has clear benefits for both RCN representatives and the employing organisation. It makes our representatives feel more supported in their role, adding to their confidence and ability. Furthermore, partnership working with employers, builds a culture that values staff; creates and maintains a safe working environment; and supports staff in taking up learning and development opportunities.

The RCN mentorship programme is a way of ensuring that local, consistent support is available to all our representatives across the UK, providing the opportunity to develop the skills they need to deliver these benefits to their organisation.

As well as providing essential individual support and representation to RCN members, representatives play a unique role in helping you to achieve your strategic and operational goals. RCN mentors are experienced in enabling representatives to play an active part at all levels.

I hope that you will take a moment to review this document. If you have any questions about the content, please feel free to contact us.

With thanks for your support.



Janet Davies

Executive Director Nursing and Service Delivery



Introduction

RCN mentoring for representatives is a flagship programme that aims to develop and maintain excellent standards of practice amongst all RCN representatives. As an employer or manager you can be confident that our highly trained RCN representatives are well supported by their mentor throughout their time as a representative.

Every accredited RCN representative is entitled under legislation (outlined in the References to UK legislation on page 7) to time off for trade union duties, including training to carry out duties.

Early evaluation of the work of RCN mentors indicates that the mentorship element of learning and development is an important factor in developing confident and skilled representatives. This benefits both the representative and the employing organisation.

RCN representatives engage with employers at a local level to improve the terms and conditions of employment for their members. In some cases they deal with all ‘bargaining’ in the workplace. However, in some employment settings – such as the NHS – negotiations often take place on a UK or country basis and agreements are made within a national partnership body. In the case of UK-wide terms and conditions in the NHS this is the NHS Staff Council; in Scotland, where health is a devolved issue, NHS terms and conditions are negotiated through Scottish Terms and Conditions (STAC) which feeds into the NHS Staff Council.



Benefits that RCN representatives bring to the organisation

“...research has shown that many workers feel disengaged, dissatisfied and unmotivated – and it is not always because of poor pay or long hours. It is often because they do not feel involved, or trusted or that their creativity is being used.”

Mike Emmott, Adviser Employee Relations, CIPD (2003)

Nursing staff who are valued and who feel involved in their organisation are better able to perform more effectively and efficiently and, as a result, to deliver better care (see for example Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Services, 2010). RCN representatives can help your organisation to forge strong relations with staff so that they feel engaged, satisfied and motivated.

RCN stewards, safety and learning representatives have first hand knowledge of nursing issues and concerns. They are a direct link through to your nursing workforce and are trained to work in partnership with employers with the shared aim of improving patient and client care.

RCN representatives bring many benefits to the organisation, including:

- providing first-hand knowledge and understanding of workplace issues that can help ensure the best standard of care for patients
- prevent and resolve disputes, negotiating local solutions to any difficulties before they escalate into more serious disputes
- positively influence the organisation’s relationship with the nursing workforce, while forging good employment practices
- avoid needless accidents and incidents at work and help create a culture where staff know their wellbeing is paramount

- ensure the nursing workforce knows how they can access opportunities for their professional development, enabling them to practice safely and effectively.

Working in partnership, RCN representatives can work with you to build a culture that values staff, that creates and maintains a safe working environment, and that develops and supports staff in taking up learning and development opportunities.

The RCN mentorship programme is a way of ensuring local support is available to its representatives across the UK, so that every RCN representative has the opportunity to develop the skills they need to deliver these benefits to their organisation. Mentors support representatives as they learn how to develop the good working relationships that build trust and mutual respect, whilst sharing responsibility.

What is mentoring?



Mentorship is

... a process by which one person (the mentor) encourages another individual (mentee) to manage his or her own learning so that the mentee becomes self-reliant in the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and abilities and develops a continuous motivation to do so.”

Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002



The RCN mentoring programme enables the RCN to provide continuing support to representatives who need to adapt and learn within a constantly changing work environment. RCN representatives are able to reflect on their experiences with their mentor and take their learning back into the workplace.

Continuing support and guidance

Under legislation, RCN representatives in sectors where the RCN is recognised are entitled to take time off during working hours to carry out training for their union duties. Understandably, employers and managers want to know that RCN representatives are making the best use of this time. To enable representatives to reach high standards of competence, all accredited RCN representatives follow the RCN learning and development pathway to develop the skills and understanding they need to be effective representatives. Each representative is appointed their own mentor throughout the learning pathway.

Once they have demonstrated their ability to practise effectively (mapped against nationally recognised ENTO standards¹) they enter a phase of further mentorship which allows them to continue their learning, based on their experience in the workplace. This mentoring support is ongoing and continues for as long as the representative remains accredited within their workplace.

RCN representatives are engaged in a continuing contract with their mentor and are provided with ongoing mentorship throughout each year, to raise their level of understanding and expertise. A set of nationally recognised practice standards guide how the representative develops his or her practice. Achieving competence against these standards is carried out within the workplace. The values that inform the practice standards are based on mutual respect, partnership and the importance of equality and diversity. All RCN representatives are expected to honour the RCN dignity charter, which also informs the mentoring relationship. Further information on practice standards and the dignity charter can be found in the *RCN*

¹ ENTO (formerly the Employment NTO) was formed by a merger in 1997 of Employer Occupational Standards Council and the Occupational Health and Safety Lead Board.

representatives practice standards (pub code 003 814) and in *A Dignity Charter for RCN members* (pub code 003 587), which are both available on the RCN website at www.rcn.org.uk/publications.

Who are the mentors?

Mentors are RCN officers/professional officers, RCN assistant officers or regional facilitators.

RCN mentors themselves are experienced members of the RCN team who can help introduce representatives to key people within the health and social care networks as well as within the RCN itself. The RCN offers its mentors their own professional support and development, and all mentors are guided by a set of ENTO standards that ensure that the mentoring relationship is conducted professionally.

RCN mentors model a partnership approach when they work with representatives. The aim is that representatives take this model back into the workplace and develop good working relationships where they are able to discuss, negotiate and resolve issues to the benefit of staff, management and, ultimately, patients and clients.

RCN mentors also enable RCN representatives to be effective negotiators and advocates on behalf of members, and by so doing to ensure better health care for patients.

The impact of mentorship in the workplace

As well as providing essential individual support and representation to RCN members, representatives have a unique role in helping you to achieve your strategic and operational goals. RCN mentors are experienced in enabling representatives to play an active part at a number of levels.

• Strategic level partnership:

Through the mentoring programme the RCN supports RCN representatives to develop the partnership skills they need to work with you in your efforts to be an exemplar employer whose priority is to deliver high quality care. For example, mentors support representatives as they develop the skills they may need to be effective in working jointly with employers on key strategic issues like service redesign or productivity, and to contribute to the management of change. RCN representatives can be key players in contributing to effective change management, by creating and maintaining good communication with staff.

• Operational level partnership:

Mentors encourage representatives to be proactive in their role – focussing on prevention and development rather than confrontation. The RCN advocates a positive approach that builds on ‘what works’ rather than focusing exclusively on problems. This positive approach can be important in sustaining effective teamwork and in recruiting and retaining staff. RCN representatives, supported by their mentors, enable the nursing team to work towards their professional development plans.

RCN mentors enable representatives to help your organisation to develop a participative model of collaboration, addressing challenges in a constructive and developmental way. As one HR director explains:

“*Enjoying strong links with our RCN representatives helps to shape our agenda – the independent voice gives us the confidence that we’re actively listening to, and engaging with, our nursing workforce. Working in partnership enables us to deliver our shared goals – to drive up standards in patient safety and care.*”



Bibliography

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Klasen N and Clutterbuck D (2002) *Implementing mentoring schemes: a practical guide to successful programmes*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Royal College of Nursing (2007) *Mentorship 1 year on: evaluation of the northern mentorship programme, summary report*, Royal College of Nursing Northern Region.

References to UK legislation

England, Scotland and Wales

Time off provisions for trade union officials were brought together in sections 168-170 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. Section 43 of the Employment Act 2002 added a new right for union learning representatives to take reasonable paid time off during working hours to undertake their duties and to undertake relevant training (see Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) *Code of practice – time off for trade union duties and activities* (2009) effective from 1.1.2010).

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland the same provisions apply and are contained in the Labour Relations Agency (2004) *Code of practice: time off for trade union duties and activities (including guidance on time off for union learning representatives)*. Article 92 of the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, as amended by the Collective Redundancies and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999, and for learning representatives Article 92A of the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, and for safety representatives, Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1979.



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