

Third edition

# Handbook for RCN **learning** representatives



Royal College  
of Nursing



# Handbook for RCN learning representatives

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## Foreword

This is the third edition of the handbook that the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has produced specifically to help you carry out your role as a learning representative.

The RCN has always recognised the contribution that members can make to the development of others in the workplace. Employment legislation, passed in 2002, provided new statutory arrangements to support this, and the RCN adopted the term RCN learning representative.

The RCN learning representative role is wide and varied but always valued whether you are involved in negotiating to improve lifelong learning opportunities for staff, helping members improve their study skills, or encouraging other members to become more active in the RCN.

I believe it is crucial to establish and maintain an extensive network of active learning representatives. With your help, we can further develop and support a motivated and professional nursing workforce who will contribute effectively to the quality of health care in the UK.

**Dr Peter Carter**

OBE, PhD, MBA, MCIPD, RGN, RMN

*RCN General Secretary*

## Introduction

Congratulations on becoming a learning representative. You have joined a growing team of learning representatives who are committed to supporting the learning and career development of RCN members. This handbook is designed to help you carry out your role. It suggests ways of getting started and provides you with information about key RCN services and resources.

How your role develops will depend very much on you and the needs of your members locally. This book should be a useful source of reference whatever direction you choose to take.

Use the handbook to find out how to:

- ◆ get started in your role
- ◆ work in partnership
- ◆ work effectively with RCN officers
- ◆ tackle discrimination at work and promote diversity
- ◆ promote continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives and lifelong learning
- ◆ get local events accredited
- ◆ access RCN information sources.

## Role of a learning representative

As an RCN learning representative your role will be to:

- ◆ help nursing staff become more proactive about their learning needs in the workplace
- ◆ negotiate with employers to improve lifelong opportunities for members
- ◆ support members in planning and managing their learning
- ◆ enable members to access learning opportunities and resources
- ◆ contribute to the organisation of study days and events to meet members' learning needs in collaboration with management, RCN staff and branches
- ◆ contribute to member recruitment and retention.

You will be supported in your role by other RCN representatives, your regional RCN office, regional officers and the representatives' education team.

## Union Learning Fund

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was launched in 1998 for trade unions to

bid for funding for projects to encourage greater take-up of learning at work, and to boost their capacity as learning organisations. The RCN won three-year ULF funding for its learning representatives' programme.

There are also Union Learning Funds for Wales and Scotland funded by the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Executive respectively. RCN Scotland has been successful in winning several bids. You can find more information about the ULF on the following websites:

- ◆ [www.unionlearningfund.org.uk](http://www.unionlearningfund.org.uk)
- ◆ [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk)
- ◆ [www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)
- ◆ [www.learnirectscotland.com](http://www.learnirectscotland.com)

## Learning representatives in Scotland – growing learning branches

Supporting learning representatives by growing networks of learning in Scotland has been enhanced by the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF). This aims to 'promote activity by trade unions in support of the Scottish Executive's lifelong learning programme'.

SULF funding has allowed the RCN to develop and integrate the role of learning representatives into the wider

membership. Funding has helped to create a network of learning representatives who work in partnership with employers, RCN branches, learning providers and learning representatives from other unions. This allows learning representatives to share best practice, influence learners collectively and tackle specific challenges in their workplace or geographical area.

Mentoring, workplace buddying, shadowing opportunities and workshops developed on a needs-led basis are available to all learning representatives to support them as they develop their role.

By encouraging more colleagues to take ownership of their personal development, learning representatives are supporting members in delivering high quality services to patients and clients working in health and social care in Scotland.

For more information on SULF, network development and training and development opportunities for learning representatives in Scotland call RCN Scotland on 0845 456 7851/0131 662 1010 or email [scottish.board@rcn.org.uk](mailto:scottish.board@rcn.org.uk)

## Case histories

As the role of RCN learning representatives continues to grow, it is possible to learn from their experiences. Here we have collated a number of case histories that show how individual learning representatives have developed their role.

### Case study 1: Agenda for Change

*"I strongly believe that my role of training officer and learning representative is to give support and advice, and to aid in the development of resources necessary for all nursing staff to fulfil their CPD and lifelong learning needs. With the knowledge and skills framework being implemented in workplaces, the role of learning representatives will be an important link in supporting nurses' learning and their development needs.*

*If anyone is thinking of becoming an RCN learning representative I would say go for it. It is a satisfying and fulfilling role, which will help your own professional and personal development, and the development of your organisation's nursing staff."*

Sue Barnes, RCN learning representative, Wrightington, England

### Case study 2: finding time

*"Continuing professional development is essential to nurses. However, it's often hard to find out about everything that's on offer when you're pushed for time. Learning representatives have*

*facilitated time in order to support RCN members in their CPD. As a learning rep, I'm someone members can go to for careers advice and to develop their skills. I don't always have the answers, but I do know where to find them. The RCN is developing a network of learning reps across Scotland and we meet to keep up-to-date with what's available with new initiatives, like the RCN Learning Zone. We're all finding that encouraging others to develop their skills is really rewarding."*

*Fiona Napier, RCN learning representative, Edinburgh, Scotland*

### **Case study 3: funding conferences**

*"The first thing I did on returning from the new learning representative course was to book an appointment with the training and development manager for the trust, who happens to be my line manager. At this meeting I explained the role of a learning representative and how I thought it might benefit the organisation as much as individual RCN members. She was, and remains, entirely supportive and values the activities that are arranged. I believe this support is crucial to the role. While offering advice and support to individuals, study days and conferences have also been organised. Costs are kept to a minimum and usually just cover any speaker expenses, venue costs and catering. There is no charge to trust staff (members or non-members). Some events are marketed and the income funds the free places for our own staff. The regional office assists with any advertising and marketing that is required."*

*Elaine Fazel, RCN learning representative, Wigan, England*

### **Case study 4: the rewards**

*"Whenever I meet someone new within the health care setting I always inform him or her about my role of RCN learning representative. I see my role as encouraging nurses to set up their own personal profiles and how to continue with their lifelong learning and importantly to bring this back to the workplace, so that everyone can benefit from their education thereby giving evidence-based care to their patients. This has been done through setting up resource files, providing bullet point lists or mini-training sessions. At all times I have encouraged my colleagues to reflect on their practice. The role of learning representatives is particularly rewarding. It has enhanced my practice as a nurse and made me more understanding as a manager, one who has a thirst for learning and one who encourages all staff to chase their dreams and put this into reality. Staff recognise the importance of giving evidence-based care and working within the clinical governance agenda."*

*Marjorie Couch, RCN learning representative, Griffithstown, Wales*

### **Case study 5: Scottish Union Learning Fund**

*"Becoming a learning representative has given me a much better understanding of how much the RCN has to offer members. These resources, such as the range of publications, online journals and the Learning Zone, have helped me in my practice, and there is always a member of staff just a phone call away to help when I need it. Having this broader understanding of what is available has added to my*

*desire to pass this knowledge on to others, and has enhanced my current role in the clinical effectiveness department. I enjoy opening people's minds to what learning has to offer, by creating an environment where people feel free to ask questions and want to know and understand more. One of the great things about being a learning representative is the opportunity to network with other people with an interest in learning but who work in different clinical environments. It's a great opportunity to share thoughts and ideas about how to motivate and support people. I have also valued the opportunity to help develop the support structures offered to learning representatives in Scotland through the Scottish Union Learning Fund, as well as the opportunity to facilitate on training courses for new learning representatives."*

*Di Douglas, RCN learning representative, Carstairs, Scotland*

*in palliative care. We arrange the venue... invite a range of speakers depending on the subjects, and advertise through the RCN Bulletin, email system, flyers and on the website."*

*Fay Plant, RCN learning representative, West Midlands*

#### **Case study 6: inspiration from members**

*"With all the study days in Shropshire, we try to get inspiration for the themes from members, either at meetings or most usually we ask them what further topics they would like covered on evaluations forms at study events. Most of these events are organised through the local RCN branch, and the committee shares the organisation of events. No one member is responsible for the whole event, but one or several members of a committee volunteers to co-ordinate the event and the rest of the committee is the team behind them. Some of the recent subjects covered are dementia, Agenda for Change, and pain*

## Getting started

### Establishing contacts

Once you've been elected and completed your learning representative course, you will want to get on and begin to make contacts and set things up. Don't worry if you feel that you're not making as much progress as you wanted, or feel a little overwhelmed – people often feel like this when they start out on any new venture.

You will play an important role in the RCN branch. Initially you will need to develop a regular network of communication between yourself and key RCN branch members – including the branch chair, secretary, treasurer, and other RCN representatives who regularly attend branch meetings, other learning representatives, and RCN professional structures.

Other key contacts may include: RCN staff (regional director, officers and regional office staff); local human resources (HR) advisers; managers; professional development nurses; training departments; managers, matrons and owners in the local independent sectors, and nursing agencies. Over time it will help to build up a network of contacts and regularly communicate with them.

Your line manager's support is very important because it will help when you want time-off from work for union activities. They are likely to be influential in your workplace and will have some control over resources.

You can also work with other learning representatives as well as safety representatives and stewards. There can be mutual benefit from working with other unions too. Working as a multi-union team is generally more likely to raise awareness with your employer.

Most importantly, you will need to consider how you are going to find out about RCN members' views locally on the services and events that you should organise. This can happen at branch meetings, but it may also be possible by talking informally to nursing staff in the workplace.

### Ideas to help you

- ◆ Talk to RCN staff.
- ◆ Plan your time carefully.
- ◆ Decide how much time you can afford to give and stick to it.
- ◆ Prioritise what you are going to do.
- ◆ Decide whose help you will need to succeed.
- ◆ Talk to RCN members about their ideas for events.

- ◆ Make contact with people in charge of room bookings.
- ◆ Attend branch meetings.
- ◆ Make contact with local RCN professional structures and other learning representatives.
- ◆ Contact your chief nurse/executive nurse.
- ◆ Decide on what facilities you need.
- ◆ Use the checklist below to help you find out what's going on at your workplace.
- ◆ Keep activity sheets to help you keep records and to focus on members' needs.

Remember, you do not actually have to organise meetings or events yourself – just encourage and help others to see the opportunities and then facilitate the process. The key to success in your role depends on making your presence known. Get out and about, find out what members really want, and then facilitate action.

### **Making your role clearer**

To make your role clearer we have put together a number of questions in the form of a checklist that might help you when you start out. They are just a few of the issues and activities that you might have to deal with as a learning representative. You can use them to

help you focus on your job as a learning representative, and adapt them to your needs and ideas for your workplace.

### **The basics**

- ◆ Where do you discuss workplace learning opportunities?
  - ◆ Does the RCN have an agreement with your employer on learning?
  - ◆ Does your employer consult you on learning issues?
  - ◆ What learning is provided in your workplace?
  - ◆ Do any groups of nursing staff miss out on learning opportunities?
  - ◆ How do people decide on what learning opportunities to take up or ask for, and what do they get?
  - ◆ Is there information, advice and guidance provided on learning opportunities such as personal development plans, appraisal systems and so on?
  - ◆ Are the outcomes of learning recorded?
  - ◆ How is learning funded in your workplace?
  - ◆ Have you participated in learning at work?
- If you have, was it:
- ◆ related to your job?
  - ◆ linked to a qualification?

- ◆ helpful to you?
- ◆ Learning and Skills Councils?
- ◆ Employee Development Schemes?
- ◆ Individual Learning Accounts?
- ◆ Learndirect?
- ◆ Investors in People (IiP)?

### **Role of the learning representative**

Do you:

- ◆ work with other RCN representatives?
- ◆ represent members on learning with employers?
- ◆ identify members' learning needs?
- ◆ develop awareness and knowledge of learning opportunities?
- ◆ gather, record and organise information?

### **Identifying RCN members' learning needs**

Do you:

- ◆ establish methods for identifying learning needs and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of different methods?
- ◆ identify individual learning needs?
- ◆ carry out learning needs identification interviews and make a record of that interview?
- ◆ produce a plan to identify learning needs in your workplace?

- ◆ identify learning options available, funding and so on?

A questionnaire is one way of identifying learning needs in the workplace. You can use this to gather information from members on their: hours of work and work patterns; learning needs; barriers to learning (e.g. childcare commitments, personal motivations to learn, shift patterns, lack of confidence, time); the subjects and activities they would like available as learning opportunities; and preferred methods for the delivery of learning.

### **Working with employers on learning**

Do you:

- ◆ have an understanding of current workplace learning initiatives?
- ◆ identify options for working with your employer to meet the learning and skill needs of nurses at your workplace?
- ◆ prepare plans for taking up learning opportunities you identify?

The TUC provided some of the information for this checklist. It set up unionlearn specifically to provide support for learning representatives. The website at [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk) provides information on a range of

learning and skills initiatives, negotiating learning agreements, learning and organising, and skills for life.

### **Publicise your successes**

Promote your successes with learning projects or activities to members and non-members. You can do this using posters, notice boards, the RCN website and employer newsletters.

## **Time-off for union duties**

The Employment Act 2002 introduced statutory rights for union learning representatives. The legislation gives learning representatives the right to paid time-off provided they are in an independent union, and in a workplace where their union is recognised by the employer for collective bargaining.

The legislation states that a learning representative is entitled to reasonable time-off if they are doing any of the following:

- ◆ promoting the value of learning and training
- ◆ arranging learning and training
- ◆ providing information and advice on learning and training

- ◆ analysing learning and training needs
- ◆ consulting on any of the above
- ◆ preparing any of the above
- ◆ training.

In Northern Ireland, the Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 specifies the time-off entitlement for union learning representatives. It is much the same in the other three countries.

You will find a detailed list of examples of relevant trade union duties in the ACAS Code of Practice 3 Time-off for union duties and activities (2003). You can find this on the ACAS website [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk). This is similar to the content of the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) publication of the same name for Northern Ireland members. You can find this on the LRA website [www.lra.org.uk](http://www.lra.org.uk).

To qualify for paid time-off as a learning representative, your RCN office has to give your employer notice that you have been appointed a learning representative. This is on the basis that you are already trained to carry out your duties either at the time of notification or within six months.

If you need training, then your RCN office has to notify your employer in writing that you will undertake

appropriate training. Once the training is complete the RCN will again write to your employer. The six-month qualifying period may be extended by the employer if there are unforeseen circumstances such as ill health or pregnancy.

Once your employer has been notified they are obliged to recognise you as a learning representative by giving you paid time-off to carry out your duties and any further training.

The amount and frequency of the time-off has to be 'reasonable' in all circumstances. When you request time-off you must give your employer as much notice as possible; the purpose of the time-off; the location; timing and duration; and the contents of any training course. Employers consider each request for time-off on its merits.

Union members who need to access their learning representative have the right to do this in work time, but the employer does not have to pay them.

### **Agenda for Change and time-off**

Section 25 of the Agenda for Change: *NHS terms and conditions of service handbook* (2005) specifically addresses the issue of time-off and facilities for staff representatives. They go beyond what is offered in ACAS or

the LRA codes of practice to encourage participation in the process of partnership.

The handbook states:

*'NHS employers should allow reasonable paid facility time for recognised staff officials to carry out negotiations with the employer about matters for which the union is recognised and to undergo training relevant to these duties.'*

The duties and relevant training mentioned in the handbook are much the same as those referred to in the ACAS/LRA materials. The full text of the handbook is on the Department of Health website [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk).

### **Payment for time-off**

An employer who gives representatives time-off for trade union duties or to attend training relevant to their duties must pay them for the time taken off. The employer must pay the amount the representative would have earned had they worked during the time-off taken. Where earnings vary employers should calculate an amount based on the average hourly earnings for the work they are employed to do.

There is no statutory requirement to pay for time-off where the duty is carried out at a time when the

representative would not otherwise have been at work. However, part-time staff are entitled to be paid if full-time staff are entitled to be paid. In all cases the amount of time-off must be reasonable.

### **Payment for time-off for trade union activities**

There is no statutory requirement that union members or representatives are paid for time-off taken on trade union activities. Activities may include branch, area or regional meetings of the union where the business of the union is under discussion. Nevertheless, employers may want to consider payment in certain circumstances, for example to ensure that employees can make use of the services of a union learning representative.

### **Who can help you?**

Your regional officer is able to support you and act on your behalf in getting time-off to do your duties and to release members for union activities.

Your line manager is an important ally in getting time-off. They will make a judgement as to whether safe and productive levels of work can be managed in your absence.

Your HR department should know the Employment Act and support you in getting time-off. But, if you have difficulties with HR it might be useful to arrange a meeting with the regional officer and HR staff.

Although employers must grant reasonable time-off to representatives of recognised trade unions to carry out their duties, there is an element of discretion over what may be regarded as reasonable. If you are refused a time-off request that you consider reasonable, put the case in writing to the manager. Refer to the law, ACAS or LRA codes of practice and local agreements, and set out why you believe it should be granted. If time-off is still refused, you should:

- ◆ ask the manager concerned to put the reasons in writing
- ◆ contact your RCN officer.

When a union believes that an employer is unreasonably refusing to grant learning representatives paid time-off, or allowing union members to access learning representative services, then the union can make a complaint to an Employment Tribunal.

A formal agreement between a union and employer on time-off can avoid misunderstanding and ensure fair and reasonable treatment.

## Time-off and facilities agreements

Although not strictly necessary, agreements over time-off can be one way to facilitate getting time-off in practice. However, the absence of an agreement does not affect your statutory right to time-off as it is set out in law.

A time-off agreement should specify:

- ◆ amount of time-off permitted
- ◆ occasions on which time-off can be taken
- ◆ in what circumstances time-off will be paid
- ◆ to whom time-off will be paid
- ◆ procedure for requesting time-off
- ◆ procedure for resolving grievances about time off.

In Scotland there is a further layer of support to trade unions known as PIN (Partnership Information Network) guidelines.

You should also negotiate with your employer for access to the facilities that will help you do your job as a learning representative. Employers should consider making available facilities for you such as rooms for meetings or interviews, office space, photocopying, notice boards to give information to RCN members and use of the internet and email.

Here are some tips to help you:

- ◆ involve your RCN officer and other local RCN representatives at an early stage and formulate a proposal for the time and facilities that you think you need – initially this could be for a couple of hours per week and access to a photocopier, email and the internet
- ◆ consider the positive benefits to your employer of becoming involved in this type of partnership with the RCN – this may help to sell the idea
- ◆ promote the concept of the learning representative as a way of helping employers to assist their nursing staff to keep up-to-date – remember, you want to work with all nursing staff not just RCN members, because this is also a recruitment opportunity
- ◆ decide who would be the best person to discuss this matter with – such as nurse executive director, chief executive, director of human resources
- ◆ make initial contact with a letter, then offer to come and discuss it further to reinforce your message
- ◆ devise a leaflet or information sheet that you can leave with key people to reinforce your message
- ◆ ensure your colleagues support and

understand what you are trying to do and how it will help and benefit them

- ◆ get the RCN and your employer to sign any agreements that have been reached and produce a paper that outlines them.

It may seem like a lot of work – but a little thought at this stage and you'll be in the right place to develop a successful role as a learning representative. If you require a specimen facilities agreement, just contact your local RCN officer.

## Partnerships and learning agreements

Collective bargaining is the arrangement that enables negotiation between employees (usually via their unions) and employers on particular employment issues. In the UK these issues include pay, holidays and sickness benefits, but not training and learning. The provision of learning and training opportunities remains at the discretion of each individual employer. There is evidence that union negotiation over training brings benefits to employees and even greater returns to employers in terms of increased productivity. Further information on this can be found on

the TUC unionlearn website [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk).

By engaging with employers at the negotiating table, unions can help establish learning partnerships that benefit employers and employees. Partnership works when it is based on collaboration and the development of trust. A learning agreement can provide a visible sign of management commitment to working in partnership with union learning representatives.

Negotiating a learning agreement helps embed learning in the workplace and secures employer commitment to supporting lifelong learning and skills. It formalises arrangements for union learning representatives and sets up joint employer/union learning committees to support their activities. Your regional officer should be able to help you negotiate a learning agreement, and a model TUC learning agreement can be found on the unionlearn website (see above).

If union recognition is in place, a learning agreement might include:

- ◆ setting up a joint learning committee or steering group involving employees, union learning representatives, training and HR staff and relevant departmental representatives

- ◆ carrying out learning needs surveys
- ◆ regular activities to promote learning
- ◆ distributing information and learning opportunities
- ◆ managing release from work for learning.

You may also use a learning agreement to formalise arrangements for:

- ◆ paid time-off for union learning representative duties
- ◆ paid time-off to attend union learning representative training
- ◆ facilities available for use by union learning representatives.

## Working with RCN officers

Feedback from learning representatives suggests that the role is more successful if they work closely with RCN officers. So it is important that you understand the role of the officer and how you can get support from them.

RCN officers are the focus for all RCN activity in a particular region. They represent members, recruit and support RCN representatives, and co-ordinate branch activities. The local branch is the main point of contact for

all RCN members, including students and associate members. You can find more information on RCN offices and branches in the *RCN members' handbook*. You receive the latest edition of this each time you renew your membership.

By working collaboratively with RCN officers, matching local need to RCN professional/educational and employment resources, you can bring aspects of professional development to members in their workplace and to their local RCN branch.

### Developing a member profile

Developing a profile for your RCN members and where they work helps you understand the issues and priorities of members in your local area. Completing this profile could be the basis of an initial meeting with RCN officers. Here the officers' knowledge of the area, employment environments and professional issues affecting members locally is invaluable. Learning representatives and RCN officers can then discuss and agree a strategy for action with realistic and achievable aims.

### Networking

RCN officers can help you by facilitating networking opportunities.

For example, they can set up contacts with other RCN representatives, other learning representatives and with local RCN membership groups. Meeting other learning representatives from your area helps you to develop support mechanisms. Many officers hold regular meetings where learning representatives meet, network, share ideas and develop unified action plans for professional events and activities. You can also use the activist area on the RCN website to network with other learning representatives.

Finding venues suitable for local educational events can often be a daunting task. An RCN officer's knowledge of the local area, facilities of local NHS trusts and other employers can be very useful.

### **Widening the membership**

Membership of the RCN was extended to health care support workers and nurse cadets in 2001. From October 2005, RCN Council decided to widen the membership further to anyone working in health and social care with a qualification, or working towards a qualification. The qualification should be equivalent to level one and above of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in England, and level three upwards of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Members in this category are able to access the wide range of benefits and services on offer. This includes representation and advice in the workplace, and professional development through the RCN's lifelong learning programmes.

Learning representatives should be aware of the needs of the new members and carry out learning needs surveys, promote learning, hand out information, make members aware of learning opportunities and manage their release from work for learning.

## **Putting equality and diversity at the heart of the RCN**

The RCN believes that diversity is about recognising the difference between people and making constructive use of those differences to improve and enhance the working lives for RCN members and employees. The RCN seeks to promote equality and diversity in the way it provides services to members, how it behaves as an employer, how it acts as a corporate citizen and how it supports nurses to deliver care. To ensure that equality and diversity is placed at the heart of the organisation, the RCN aims to:

- ◆ place diversity and equality at the heart of the organisation
- ◆ support and work in partnership with a range of other organisations to promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ actively value diversity as a core part of our strategic aims as well as our day-to-day business management practices
- ◆ deliver better outcomes for RCN members and patient care through our commitment to implementing equality of opportunity and valuing diversity
- ◆ ensure that diversity and equality issues are reflected in our campaigning and policy work as well as mainstreamed throughout the organisation
- ◆ move into a position of leadership and recognised good practice in relation to diversity and equality, therefore achieving positive outcomes for members and employees of the RCN.

The RCN believes that embracing the richness of experiences, skills and talents in nursing helps deliver better patient care and better health outcomes for the UK's diverse communities.

As we continue to develop our services to meet the varied needs of our members, we strive to provide

resources that are relevant, appropriate and responsive to those needs. The RCN encourages and supports learning representatives and all RCN activists to incorporate good practice equality and diversity principles into their roles.

### **What is diversity and why is it important?**

Diversity is about all the differences that exist between us, as well as the differences such as age, race, sexuality and so on that we are all familiar with. It includes less obvious differences that may include educational background, learning styles, work experience. Valuing diversity is the way in which we actively and constructively make use of those differences to achieve positive outcomes for everyone.

As health care professionals, it is particularly important that nurses actively promote diversity in their own practice. Failure to do so can have a devastating impact as the quote from the World Health Organization indicates:

*'Overt or implicit discrimination violates one of the fundamental principles of human rights and often lies at the root of poor health status. Discrimination against women; the elderly; ethnic; religious and linguistic*

*minorities; persons with disabilities; indigenous populations and other marginalised groups in society both causes and magnifies poverty and ill-health.'*

(World Health Organization Health & Human Rights publication series issue 2, 2001)

As well as promoting improved health outcomes for patients, active and positive promotion provides other benefits to the nursing profession, nurses and their employing organisations. They include:

- ◆ greater confidence and in nursing as a force for change
- ◆ enhanced reputation of nursing as a viable career choice
- ◆ improved cultural competence in the profession
- ◆ improved knowledge of how to operate sensitively in different cultures
- ◆ enhanced creativity and innovation in nursing roles and patient interaction
- ◆ the ability to attract, recruit and retain nurses from the widest possible talent base
- ◆ reduced costs of staff turnover and absenteeism
- ◆ reduced risk of legal challenge and financial sanction against employers and service providers.

## The role of the learning representative

The RCN has a key role to play tackling discrimination and promoting diversity awareness because we are committed to equity and good relations between diverse groups in the nursing profession and the health service. You may find yourself working closely with RCN stewards and staff to take this forward into your workplace. As a learning representative you need to consider the following:

- ◆ diversity of health care staff – people from a diverse range of backgrounds and ages may have different learning needs and styles
- ◆ diversity of working patterns and work environments – some people may only be able to access learning opportunities at particular times and locations
- ◆ diversity of nursing when learning programmes and training are being planned and delivered
- ◆ range of support provided by the RCN to members so that you can effectively signpost members who may approach you for advice because of your role as learning representative. In particular, be aware of the role of RCN stewards and full-time officers in representing individuals who experience discrimination at work, including bullying and harassment.

## RCN diversity champions

If you would like to get more involved in the promotion of diversity awareness, you could consider becoming an RCN diversity champion. This is a new role in the RCN that any member can get involved with.

### The role – what diversity champions do

- ◆ Recognise that diversity and equality are intrinsic to the success and performance of their own organisation.
- ◆ Treat others with dignity and respect.
- ◆ Challenge and overcome obstacles in mainstreaming diversity and equality issues.
- ◆ Create a positive work environment.
- ◆ Place a high value on diversity and fairness.
- ◆ Remove any barriers that may impede progress around diversity and equality issues.
- ◆ Actively support efforts to make the work environment and his/her respective organisation inclusive.
- ◆ Make an effort to regularly communicate the benefits of diversity and the organisation's successes.

To find out more about how to register as a diversity champion, and to receive your complimentary diversity toolkit, which is available on a memory stick, email your details to [diversity.team@rcn.org.uk](mailto:diversity.team@rcn.org.uk)

## Role of the learning representative and lifelong learning

Your role as a learning representative is to raise awareness and to help nursing staff take forward professional development and lifelong learning in their workplaces.

Continuing professional development (CPD) and PREP (post-registration education and practice) are legal requirements that ensure nurses keep up-to-date and improve their practice. By doing this they can raise standards of care for patients and clients, wherever they work. In your role as a learning representative you are ideally placed to help nursing staff with CPD – by promoting a range of initiatives, setting up CPD activity in the workplace and linking in with local RCN branches and offices.

### PREP requirements

Registered nurses have a legal duty to keep updated professionally to remain

on the register. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) sets PREP practice and CPD requirements. When re-registering with the NMC every three years, nurses have to sign that they have fulfilled the PREP and CPD standard requirements and kept a profile of their professional development.

There are two separate PREP requirements that affect registration.

### 1. The PREP (practice) standard

A registrant must have worked in some capacity in nursing, midwifery or specialist community public health nursing during the previous three years for a minimum of 450 hours, or have successfully undertaken a return-to-practice course in the last three years.

### 2. The PREP (continuing professional development) standard

Registrants must have undertaken at least 35 hours of learning activity relevant to their practice during three years prior to registration renewal. They should maintain a personal professional profile (PPP) of their learning activity and comply with any request from the NMC to audit how they have met these requirements.

Since April 2000 registrants have also had to declare on their Notification of Practice (NOP) form that they have met this requirement when they renew their registration.

The PREP (CPD) standard can be met in many different ways. It is important to remember that:

- ◆ there is no such thing as approved PREP (CPD) learning activity
- ◆ you do not need to collect points or certificates of attendance
- ◆ there is no approved format for the PPP
- ◆ it must be relevant to the work you are doing and/or plan to do in the near future
- ◆ it must help you provide the highest possible standards of care for your patients and clients.

PREP has caused considerable concern for nurses. Many think that it is their employers' responsibility to provide resources for their continuing professional development. Others misread 'five days of study' and think they have to attend five study days. Yet attending an event, or even gaining a certificate, does not confirm that learning has taken place.

Your role is vital. You can help nurses with their concerns about PREP and:

- ◆ act as a guide to local CPD resources
- ◆ act as a liaison between the RCN and the health care setting
- ◆ promote the use of RCN CPD initiatives for individuals and groups
- ◆ liaise with nursing managers to promote RCN CPD initiatives
- ◆ provide information about learning opportunities, signpost to external agencies such as career guidance, college courses and so on, be aware of rights and entitlements to learning.

### What is CPD?

CPD is not just about PREP. Nursing is a continuing cycle of learning and achievement – and CPD is about providing the best possible care for patients and clients. The RCN is committed to supporting CPD by providing opportunities for professional development wherever nursing staff live and work, and by expanding its range of services.

CPD is about nursing staff maintaining and enhancing their knowledge, expertise and competence throughout their career. It is an ongoing process and nursing staff must keep a record of their development. CPD is the responsibility of each individual staff member.

Registered nurses are personally accountable for their practice under the NMC Code of professional conduct (2002). Although employers have a statutory duty to ensure the provision of training for employees, it is not their responsibility to maintain nurses' professional competence.

Lifelong learning is an integral part of CPD, which is key to the practice of nursing. It provides a range of learning and practice development opportunities for nurses working in the NHS and the independent sector. For example, the RCN national and regional offices hold regular study days, events and conferences as part of the lifelong learning programmes.

All NMC publications are free, including the PREP handbook (2006). To obtain copies, you can telephone 020 7637 7181 or download them from the NMC website [www.nmc-uk.org](http://www.nmc-uk.org).

### Why is CPD necessary?

The NMC introduced PREP as part of its quality assurance system to improve the standard of patient and client care. Growing knowledge and advances in science mean that nursing staff must keep pace with change. CPD is essential if their practice is to remain dynamic and responsive.

Nursing staff need to increase their professional competence by embracing a new approach to learning and professional self-development. To maintain and enhance knowledge, skills and understanding, nursing staff need a plan formulated to their individual needs – and the needs of their employer, the nursing profession, patients and clients.

Nursing staff themselves must identify any learning that has taken place, either by private or organised study, by self-reflection or reflection with a colleague (but not by collecting certificates or letters of attendance).

Keeping a profile requires nursing staff to assess their competence – to consider where they are today and what knowledge, skills and understanding they have. They then need to consider how they will maintain their competence, remain up-to-date with changes and continue to develop professionally. Firstly, they need to draw up an action plan, with information on development needed and how this will be achieved.

### **Auditing PREP compliance**

The NMC has been auditing compliance with the PREP (CPD) standard since 2001. Each month up to 10 per cent of nurses who are due to

renew their registrations are selected for audit. The completed forms show how the learning activity that nurses have undertaken has helped to improve patient and client care.

### **Reflective practice**

CPD development is recorded through reflection. Reflection is a concept new to many nurses, even though they may have been doing it without realising it. Reflecting on action is retrospective and requires a questioning approach. Consider the example below.

#### **Example: How nurses can use reflective practice**

Think back to when you last carried out a health assessment on a patient or client, or a performance review with a member of your staff. How well did you do? Did you make the person feel comfortable at the beginning? Were you well prepared with the right information to hand? Did you ask open questions and listen to what they had to say? How did you handle any problems? What could you do to improve your practice in future? Are you up-to-date with the procedures?

If the answer is yes, how do you know? It may be helpful to discuss this with a colleague. If the answer is no – what do you need to do to update yourself? Once you have decided where you need to improve or update, you should plan how to meet your needs – by private study,

undertaking courses or attending study days. Whatever method you prefer, it needs to fit into your lifestyle, both personal and professional.

### Private study

Private study is a flexible way to meet CPD needs. It allows nurses to set aims and to determine what and how they want to learn.

#### Example: How nurses can undertake private study

You may decide that you need to refresh and develop your knowledge of resuscitation and basic life support (your aim). You will need to refresh yourself about the steps to take on finding a collapsed person, the possible causes of unconsciousness and how to manage a person in respiratory or cardiac arrest (your learning outcomes).

Once you have identified some aims and learning outcomes, you will need to plan how to achieve them. You may decide that you need to attend a first aid-refresher day organised by your employer, or undertake private study if your organisation does not hold study days. This may mean visiting a nursing library and carrying out a literature search. If you have not done this before, then ask the librarian for help. They are experienced in literature searching and many run courses that may help.

You may study an article in a professional journal or UK guidelines. Whichever method is right for you, the important thing is to reflect on and record what you have learnt from the experience. Keep this in your personal professional profile, together with your aims and learning outcomes. This will allow you to show how you have kept up-to-date in this area. If you feel that you need to test your learning, you can arrange discussions with colleagues or present your findings from private study to a small group of colleagues and complete your reflections after the discussions.

### Skills for life

As a learning representative you may be asked to facilitate access to support or resources for members who need help with lifelong learning skills. For example:

- ◆ studying
- ◆ presentation skills
- ◆ information retrieval
- ◆ numeracy and literacy skills
- ◆ information communication technology (ICT) skills.

A range of resources, including online courses in computers and self-development to improve maths and English skills, are available on the Learndirect website [www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk) or [www.learndirectscotland.com](http://www.learndirectscotland.com).

## Recruiting members

RCN representatives have a valuable role to play in recruiting new members. By recruiting more members, the RCN will have more influence with your employer and employers nationally.

Potential new members will ask you why they should join. For key messages on the value of RCN membership and helpful materials go to RCN Online at [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk).

### Tips on recruiting members

- ◆ Make a presentation at hospital induction days.
- ◆ Send information to your HR department.
- ◆ Place information in an induction pack for new staff, including RCN material.
- ◆ Make sure that you involve the local student representative on student recruitment days.
- ◆ Have walkabouts around wards/departments at planned times (maybe crossover shifts).
- ◆ Run a stall in training/resource centres at lunchtimes to target participants on specific courses.
- ◆ Make sure the RCN is represented at staff side meetings and have

informal meetings with the staff side chair.

- ◆ Make sure you keep up-to-date with what other unions are doing.
- ◆ Make use of noticeboards and keep them updated with posters, a mix of local and national information and photographs of current representatives.
- ◆ Put information on your employer's website with a photograph of current representatives and an email contact for any issues.
- ◆ Put an article in your employer's magazine or newsletter.

## Promoting RCN CPD initiatives

The RCN is committed to supporting the CPD and PREP requirements of its members and is expanding its services all the time. As a learning representative you can help nursing staff by being aware of, and promoting CPD initiatives that are relevant to their area of practice. This section sets out some of the RCN tools to help nurses with CPD.

### RCN Learning Zone

The RCN Learning Zone is a unique and flexible online eLearning resource.

It enables you to learn what you need to enhance your professional and personal effectiveness and so improve patient care. It allows members to build up their own electronic professional development portfolio. This facility is only available to RCN members at [www.rcn.org.uk/learningzone](http://www.rcn.org.uk/learningzone)

Key areas on the RCN Learning Zone include:

- ◆ an electronic portfolio to encouraging reflection on learning, capture evidence of achievements and build a CV
- ◆ learning opportunities on personal development, clinical skills, activist skills and skills for learning
- ◆ a searchable compilation of professionally relevant resources – books, journals, websites and all the RCN career and competency frameworks.

The package includes a mix of media such as animation, and graphics, and engaging interactive learning experiences.

The RCN Learning Zone recognises the pressure and challenges of working to provide modern-day health care and life/work balance. With this in mind, learning is made accessible through creating short, sharp, bite-sized chunks

called learning opportunities. You can print any of the material on the site and take it away with you to read when computer access may not be available.

### CPD articles

These appear in every issue of *Nursing Standard* and regularly in other specialist journals including *Emergency Nurse*, *Elderly Care*, *Paediatric Nursing*, *Primary Health Care* and *Mental Health Nursing*. They cover a variety of nursing topics such as skin care, neurology, mobility and pharmacology, and are accompanied by an assessment in which nurses can reflect on what they have learned and how it can be applied to practice.

### RCN conferences, events and resources

Information about RCN accredited courses, conferences and events can be found on the RCN website. A variety of meetings and study days are also organised by RCN regional offices throughout the UK, many of which are free to members. Contact your regional office for further details and check the listings in *RCN Bulletin* every fortnight.

You can also contact RCN Events or RCN Direct.

**RCN Events**

Telephone: 020 7647 3577

Email: [rcn.events@rcn.org.uk](mailto:rcn.events@rcn.org.uk)

**RCN Direct**

Telephone: 0845 772 6100

**RCN accreditation of educational events and resources**

The RCN Accreditation Unit provides rigorous assessment by subject specialists and educational reviewers to ensure that an event, a course or piece of learning material is up-to-date, of best practice, and promotes excellence. A key aim of the unit's work is to support nurses and the wider health family to be competent in practice, and to develop further skills and competence.

The Accreditation Unit offers accreditation on a UK-wide basis to external organisations that provide educational initiatives. This includes conferences and short courses, facilitator packs, eLearning and further and higher education modules and educational initiatives for health care support workers.

Accreditation entitles participants to a certificate of attendance and provides a framework for reflection, so that they can identify for themselves the learning that has taken place.

There is an accreditation fee to external organisations.

To find out more, contact the RCN Accreditation Unit:

Telephone: 020 7647 3647

Email: [accreditation@rcn.org.uk](mailto:accreditation@rcn.org.uk)

**Accessing information**

Offering support and advice to nurses on how to access information forms a key part of your role. You should know where they can go for further expert help in the RCN.

**RCN offices**

Most RCN offices have an excellent stock of RCN leaflets and other materials that you can take away with you. Some offices also offer access to the BNI (British Nursing Index), online journals and other quick reference information services.

**RCN Direct**

RCN Direct can offer information and advice about PREP and CPD, career, employment and professional issues.

RCN Direct

Telephone: 0845 772 6100

## RCN Careers Service

The RCN Careers Service offers guidance on career planning, help with job applications, CVs and interview skills. A range of fact sheets covering different options in nursing are available. To make an appointment for telephone guidance contact the RCN Careers Service.

RCN Careers Service  
Telephone: 0845 408 4391  
Email: [careerandwelfare@rcn.org.uk](mailto:careerandwelfare@rcn.org.uk)

## RCN Library and Information Services

RCN Library and Information Services (LIS) is committed to supporting RCN learning representatives. The RCN UK library in London is Europe's leading nursing library with more than 88,000 volumes, 500 videos and over 400 current journals on nursing and related subjects. It is based at the RCN office in London, and is complemented by RCN libraries in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast.

LIS services are available to all RCN members, and include:

- ◆ loans of books and videos, in person or by post
- ◆ photocopying of journal articles, in person or by post
- ◆ literature searches for full RCN members
- ◆ information skills training
- ◆ inter-library loans
- ◆ free internet use in RCN libraries
- ◆ access to electronic journals and eBooks
- ◆ access to a range of information databases for literature searching.

There is a charge for inter-library loans and photocopying, and also for books sent by post.

Enquires can be made in person, telephone, email or by fax. Qualified librarians, experienced in the field of nursing literature, are happy to advise on sources of information, search strategies and techniques, evaluation of literature and library services.

LIS produces guides to searching for information including:

- ◆ BNI - finding journal articles
- ◆ finding information – databases for your subject search
- ◆ critical appraisal – an annotated list of websites and other resources.

A range of leaflets outlining services including the RCN eLibrary are available. If you would like copies for your personal use or for use with RCN members, please contact your local RCN library.

For full information about LIS services use the LIS contact details below:

RCN Library and Information Services  
(UK library)

Telephone: 0845 337 3368

Email: rcn.library@rcn.org.uk

RCN Northern Ireland

Telephone: 0845 456 7839

Email: library.belfast@rcn.org.uk

RCN Scotland

Telephone: 0131 662 6163/6164

Email: scotland.library@rcn.org.uk

RCN Wales

Telephone: 029 2075 1373

Email: wales.library@rcn.org.uk

### **RCN eLibrary**

Many of our information services can be accessed online. The RCN eLibrary is available free to RCN members on the RCN website and includes:

#### **Online nursing journals**

Access to a range of leading nursing journals is available free and in full text. Titles available currently include *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, and *Nursing Standard*.

#### **Free access to electronic books (eBooks)**

Reference access for nursing staff is available to over 200 full text current

titles on topics of interest. This is available from the RCN eLibrary and from the RCN library catalogue.

There is free access to search tools to help you find journal articles, books and websites on topics of interest to you.

### **BNI**

The BNI database is an essential resource. It includes references to articles from all the British nursing and midwifery journals. Use this database for literature searching and it will save time in identifying relevant articles. BNI is produced by a partnership that includes the RCN.

If the article is from a journal available on RCN Online you will see a link to the full text article. Articles not available online may be requested using postal photocopying services from the RCN libraries.

### **RCN library catalogue**

The RCN library catalogue holds details of all the books and videos held. This also includes details of theses held in the RCN Collection of Nursing Research and links to over 1,200 books and reports. You can also renew your books online.

### **Midwifery and Infant Care (MWIC)**

The definitive midwifery database contains references to book chapters, reports and other publications relating to midwifery, pregnancy, childbirth and early infant care. It was formerly known as MIDIRS.

### **ChildData**

A database from the National Children's Bureau giving details of books, reports, journal articles, press coverage, organisations and events relating to the care, education, health and welfare of children and young people.

### **AgeInfo**

This is very useful for members concerned with older people, it includes details of over 40,000 articles, books and reports held in the Centre for Policy on Ageing Social Gerontology collection.

### **RCN archives catalogue**

This is a listing of records of the RCN and personal collections held in the RCN Archives.

### **Intute: Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health**

The free online service provides you with access to the very best web resources for education and research. Use this service to find quality

nursing, midwifery and allied health web resources. Resources are evaluated and selected by specialists from organisations including the RCN.

[www.intute.ac.uk/nursing](http://www.intute.ac.uk/nursing)

### **Health Libraries & Information Services Directory**

The online directory to help you find services in your area can be accessed at [www.hlisd.org](http://www.hlisd.org).

## **Help in using the resources**

### **FAST**

The RCN has done the searching for you. Just choose a topic from the list and details of relevant journal articles will be found from the BNI.

### **Finding articles with BNI**

BNI is an online learning tool that will help you successfully search the British Nursing Index database and link to journal articles available through the RCN eLibrary.

All these services and more are available through the RCN eLibrary on RCN Online. If you need any help or support in using the RCN eLibrary please contact your local RCN library.

## Labour Research Department online

RCN representatives now have free online access to information on employment case law, health and safety rights and a broad range of other key trade union issues from Labour Research Department (LRD) publications online. This service allows you to search a range of publications produced over the last 10 years by the LRD, the leading research and information service for trade unionists.

LRD online is only available to RCN representatives and is accessed via the activist area on RCN Online.

## RCN Archives

The RCN's vast collection of books, journals, pamphlets and papers dates back well into the 19th century and forms a unique record of the profession. Resources include:

- ◆ photographs
- ◆ oral histories
- ◆ early textbooks
- ◆ private papers
- ◆ nursing badges.

Visit RCN Scotland in Edinburgh in person, or contact staff with your research request.

## RCN Archives

Telephone: 0131 662 6122/6123  
Email: [archives@rcn.org.uk](mailto:archives@rcn.org.uk)

## UK Centre for History of Nursing

Learn more about the history of the role of nursing and midwifery in the development of health care and social welfare. The Manchester-based UK Centre for the History of Nursing organises invaluable conferences, seminars and multidisciplinary collaboration, and provides a comprehensive website at [www.ukchnm.org](http://www.ukchnm.org).

## UK Centre for the History of Nursing & Midwifery

Email: [enquiries@ukchnm.org](mailto:enquiries@ukchnm.org)

## RCN resource centres

The RCN has a network of learning resources centres, providing access to information to meet individual and lifelong learning needs. If you would like more information about RCN resource centres, contact your local RCN office or email [resource.centre@rcn.org.uk](mailto:resource.centre@rcn.org.uk).

## Find your local health care library

Connecting for Health, in partnership with RCN Library and Information Services, has developed an online health library and information services directory. The service helps members find their local health care libraries.

## The RCN website

The RCN's website is a key resource for learning representatives. Recently redesigned to make information much easier to find, RCN Online contains a wealth of information useful in your role as a learning representative. All RCN members can even use the website to update their membership details and contact other members.

RCN Online: [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk)

## RCN communities

Communities are a fantastic new way of finding out online about what is going on in your specialty and discussing the latest developments with other RCN members. You can register for one of the specialist discussion areas found across the RCN website and can also join in the general chat in the brand new Discussion Zone.

## RCN activists

Find out all the latest activist news, read regularly updated messages from the UK Learning Representatives Committee and access stationery, LRD online, the activist member check and all the latest legal updates on the activist area of the website. This is also where you will find the latest version of this handbook – available for you to

print off whenever a new edition is published. As a learning representative, you are a key member of the activist community. Pop into the Discussion Zone and talk to activists from across the organisation. Where better to get your questions answered?

## Learning Zone

Use the Learning Zone to help with your personal and professional development. With easy-to-use bite-size learning resources, you can brush up your on your clinical and activist skills, or your skills for learning. There is also an electronic portfolio available which is great for keeping your CPD records up-to-date for the NMC's PREP requirements. As a learning representative, this is a key area for you to show to other RCN members.

## Information resources

As an RCN member, you can download all the RCN's publications from the website (free of charge) at [www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications). You also have access to the RCN eLibrary where you can view and use eBooks, over 400 full text journals and databases such as BNI. You can also search the catalogue and even renew books you have borrowed from the RCN library.

So whether you are searching for news and events or you are looking for information on a specific nursing-related subject, the website should be your first point of call. The RCN website is constantly evolving, so keep checking in to find out about all the latest updates.

## Lifelong learning at work

There is specific support and a number of workplace initiatives that are a core element of the Government's commitment to lifelong learning.

### Directgov

The Directgov website at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) includes a comprehensive section on adult learning. It offers information and advice on a range of topics including choosing courses, types of learning, financial help for adult learners, and improving skills, such as computers and IT, reading, writing and numeracy.

### Sector Skills Councils

The job of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) is to reduce skills gaps and shortages. Each is an employer-led, independent organisation. The councils aim to:

- ◆ reduce skills gaps and shortages
- ◆ improve productivity, business and public service performance
- ◆ increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce
- ◆ improving learning supply including apprenticeships, higher education and national occupational standards (NOS).

The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) funds and supports the councils, and monitors their performance.

### Skills for Health

Skills for Health covers the whole health sector – NHS, independent and voluntary employers. Its aim is 'to help the whole sector develop solutions that deliver a skilled and flexible workforce in order to improve health and healthcare'. It does this by:

- ◆ leading and facilitating the development, maintenance and use of national workforce competence frameworks, including national occupational standards, and evaluating their impact and use
- ◆ profiling the UK health sector workforce
- ◆ influencing education and training supply by developing a Sector Skills Agreement

- ◆ developing and implementing a strategy for skills escalation including the use of qualifications and career frameworks.

Find out more on the Skills for Health website at [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk).

### Learning and Skills Council

The network of 47 local learning and skills councils (LSCs) operate in England only. They are the centrepiece of the Government's strategy to create a more coherent and accessible system of education and training. They are responsible for all post-16 learning outside higher education in England.

A LSC is responsible for:

- ◆ funding of modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other government-funded training and workforce developments
- ◆ funding further education colleges
- ◆ developing arrangements for adult and community learning, in partnership with local authorities.

The boards of local LSCs have trade union, education and employer involvement. This should encourage the growth of workplace education and training.

LSC board responsibilities include:

- ◆ analysing local labour market and skills needs

- ◆ promoting the demand for skills and lifelong learning
- ◆ drawing up local workforce development strategies
- ◆ tackling poor adult basic skills.

Find out more about the Learning and Skills Council at [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk).

### Individual learning accounts (ILAs)

Staff working in the NHS in England, who do not have a work-related professional qualification, could qualify for funding to study through an NHS learning account. ILAs in Wales and Scotland are not specific to the NHS.

You can find out more on the following websites:

Department of Health: [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

ILA Wales: [www.ila-wales.org.uk](http://www.ila-wales.org.uk)

ILA Scotland: [www.ilascotland.org.uk](http://www.ilascotland.org.uk)

### Learndirect

The University for Industry (Ufi) is responsible for Learndirect across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and UK online centres in England. It aims to:

- ◆ boost the demand for lifelong learning among businesses and individuals

- ◆ promote the availability and improve the access to high quality innovative learning.

Learndirect offers information and advice on career and course options. It also provides hundreds of online courses in computers and self-development to improve maths and English skills.

Further information can be found online at:

[www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk) (includes links to sites for Wales and Northern Ireland)

[www.learndirectscotland.com](http://www.learndirectscotland.com)

Learndirect Advice provides free access to a range of tools to help learning representatives in their role in supporting learners. You can access these tools online at:

[www.advice-resources.co.uk](http://www.advice-resources.co.uk) .

## unionlearn

A wide range of resources for trade union learning representatives can be found on the TUC unionlearn website at: [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk) .

## About the RCN

The RCN is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world. Today the RCN has a membership of over 390,000 registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets. RCN members work in a variety of hospital and community settings in the NHS and the independent sector. The RCN promotes patient and nursing interests on a wide range of issues by working closely with the Government, the UK parliaments and other national and European political institutions, trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary organisations.

For today's professional nurse, midwife, nursing student or health care assistant the RCN offers a wide range of services including:

- ◆ professional support in your field of practice
- ◆ help with your continuing professional development
- ◆ help and representation at work
- ◆ legal help and indemnity insurance benefits
- ◆ education and research
- ◆ library and information services

- ◆ an extensive range of online resources
- ◆ conferences and publications
- ◆ counselling
- ◆ information and advice online and by phone
- ◆ discounts and special deals.

You can find all the information you need about RCN services in the latest *RCN members' handbook*. If you don't have a copy call RCN Direct on 0845 772 6100.

### RCN offices

Staff in RCN offices provide local members with access to the full range of RCN services. They support the activity of RCN branches, learning representatives, stewards and safety representatives in their area.

### Role of RCN officers

National and regional board officers are responsible for providing RCN services to local members in a range of employment environments including:

- ◆ NHS trusts
- ◆ GP practices
- ◆ independent hospitals, nursing homes and residential homes
- ◆ hospices
- ◆ independent school nurses
- ◆ prisons
- ◆ housing associations
- ◆ occupational health services for companies outside the health service, including industry and commerce.

RCN officers are the local focus for all RCN activity and services. Their role is concentrated in three main areas:

- ◆ individual or collective representation on employment and professional nursing matters for members
- ◆ recruiting and supporting RCN stewards, employment representatives, learning representatives and safety representatives
- ◆ supporting and developing RCN branches, and raising awareness of nursing, employment and health issues in the local area.

### Improving working conditions for nurses

The RCN's Employment Relations Department (ERD) supports nurses in developing improved working conditions and better conditions of employment. It supports and advises them during periods of organisational change and service development. The department also provides a source of specialist employment relations

expertise for RCN staff and representatives around the UK.

ERD seeks to bring about improvements for nurses in three main areas of their work:

- ◆ organisation and delivery of health care
- ◆ nurses' employment culture and environment
- ◆ career opportunities, pay and conditions of employment.

### Pay and conditions

RCN Online has the latest developments and information on pay, terms and conditions for all NHS staff:

[www.rcn.org.uk/support/pay\\_and\\_conditions](http://www.rcn.org.uk/support/pay_and_conditions) .

### Advice on career development

The RCN careers service offers guidance on career planning. To make an appointment for telephone guidance call 0845 408 4391 or email [careerandwelfare@rcn.org.uk](mailto:careerandwelfare@rcn.org.uk) .

RCN Direct can also provide information. Call 0845 772 6100 between 08.30 and 20.30, seven-days-a-week.

### RCN International Office

Members who are thinking of working or taking and elective placement abroad can contact RCN International Services for support. Staff can provide good advice and the contact details for:

- ◆ European Federation of Nurse Associations: [www.efn.be](http://www.efn.be)
- ◆ International Council of Nurses: [www.icn.ch](http://www.icn.ch)
- ◆ Commonwealth Nurses Federation: [www.commonwealthnurses.org](http://www.commonwealthnurses.org)

For more information call the RCN International Services on 020 7647 359 or email [international.office@rcn.org.uk](mailto:international.office@rcn.org.uk) .

### Other sources of information

- ◆ NHS Careers offers information on post-registration education programmes in England. Telephone: 0845 6060 655.
- ◆ Information about CPD for nursing, midwifery and health visiting in Wales are available from NHS Careers Wales (see Appendix).
- ◆ Details of Scottish post-registration education programmes are available from NHS Education for Scotland (see Appendix).
- ◆ In Northern Ireland, post-registration education programme details are held by the National

Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Northern Ireland (see Appendix).

## Sponsorship and fundraising

The RCN takes a proactive approach to secure sponsorship for RCN activities. The fundraising unit acts as the focal point for the interface with the pharmaceutical and health care industries.

### National sponsorship

The RCN has major projects that are appropriate for fundraising support. These include research funding, sponsorship of an advisory or research post, or an event or conference. Potential sponsors can be approached by the fundraising unit. There is an increasing need to gain greater funding from trust funds and philanthropic donations, and work in this area continues to grow.

### Local sponsorship

RCN offices need sponsorship money to support activities such as study days, board conferences and focus groups.

It is vital that there is a consistent approach to sponsors and sponsorship arrangements to ensure that the value of the RCN name and logo is not

undermined. For this reason, there is a sponsorship process to help learning representatives, who should keep the fundraising unit informed about any proposed approaches to sponsors.

For assistance and advice on fundraising and sponsorship, call the fundraising team on 020 7647 3934 or email [fundraising@rcn.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@rcn.org.uk).

## UK Learning Representatives' Committee

The RCN's UK Learning Representatives' Committee supports and develops the role of learning representatives. It aims to:

- ◆ promote the role and value of learning representatives within the RCN and workplaces and identify the support that they need
- ◆ ensure that the role of learning representatives reflects the needs of members in the workplace
- ◆ contribute to the development of RCN policy on lifelong learning
- ◆ assist with the programme development of the national learning representatives' conferences.

Membership of the committee consists of an elected learning representative from each of the 12 RCN sections. The elected representatives also have a seat on their regional or national board.

# Learning and development for RCN representatives

## Future Activist programme

The Future Activist programme is an exciting new way of developing a strategic learning and development framework across the UK. Using four projects running in parallel, the programme will help the RCN to recruit, support, develop and retain active members.

The four Future Activist themes are:

### 1: Developing role descriptors

Develop clear role descriptors for RCN activist roles supported by an integrated learning and development framework delivered at a local level to agreed standards.

New role descriptors, which clearly define the work of learning representatives, stewards and safety representatives, were launched in 2007. These enable the RCN to:

- ◆ recruit new representatives because they will have a better understanding of what they will be doing
- ◆ support existing representatives to translate their learning into practice

so they become more confident in their role

- ◆ develop new and existing representatives as they will understand from the descriptor what they need to know and learn to carry out their role
- ◆ retain active representatives helping them to continually update their skills and knowledge.

### 2: Developing mentoring standards

Develop standards for the mentorship and support of RCN activists to enable activists to translate their learning into their RCN role.

### 3: Developing information resources

Develop a range of high quality web and paper-based resource material to support face-to-face training delivery to identify and meet the information and knowledge management needs of RCN activists.

### 4: Evaluating the impact of learning

Evaluate the impact of learning and development activity for RCN activists.

The RCN has also successfully won funding of £250,000 over two years from unionlearn for a project specifically aimed at learning

representatives. It will develop, implement and evaluate ENTO's National Occupational Standards. The standards will be used to enhance the RCN's learning and development programmes, including the support and mentorship offered at a local level.

### Funding for adult learning

Information on grants and bursaries for adult learners can be found on the following websites:

Directgov:

[www.direct.gov.uk/adultlearning](http://www.direct.gov.uk/adultlearning)

Learn Direct:[www.learnirect.co.uk](http://www.learnirect.co.uk)

Learn Direct Scotland:

[www.learnirectscotland.com](http://www.learnirectscotland.com)

You can also refer to the following publications which should be available in your local library:

- ◆ Educational Grants Directory (published by the Directory of Social Change)
- ◆ Charities Digest (Waterlow Information Services)
- ◆ Grants Register (Macmillan Press)
- ◆ Directory of Grant Making Trusts (Charities Aid Foundation).

Career development loans are operated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (formerly the Department for Education and Skills)

in partnership with high street banks. The loans are deferred repayment bank loans that allow you to borrow between £300 to £8,000 to help pay for vocational or work-related learning. For further information and guidance call the career development loan helpline on 0800 585 0505.

## Membership of the RCN

### Membership department

The RCN Membership department is part of RCN Direct in Cardiff. It processes all queries on membership including applications for membership. Staff in the department also facilitate the mailing of new member welcome packs, renewals and replacement membership cards, collect subscriptions and keeps membership records up-to-date. A small team is also responsible for processing RCN events/conference bookings.

The membership records of all RCN members are kept up-to-date on a single database. This also contains details of subscription payments, workplace, job title, area of practice, forum membership and a history of communications with the member. Since January 2007 members have also

been able to update their personal and contact details on RCN Online [www.rcn.org.uk/myrcn](http://www.rcn.org.uk/myrcn) .

The RCN has a database management policy ensuring there are strict guidelines for accessing and using the database. RCN representatives who wish to access membership data must complete a form, available from their nearest RCN office, which is signed by the senior officer and returned to RCN Direct where the data request is processed.

### Who can join the RCN?

The following groups are able to take out membership:

- ◆ UK registered nurses, midwives and health visitors
- ◆ anyone currently pursuing their first pre-registration education programmes (student membership)
- ◆ overseas nurses
- ◆ nurses and midwives from overseas who are undertaking adaptation courses prior to registration with the NMC
- ◆ health care assistants: with a qualification in care at level 1 or above of the National Qualifications Framework in England and Wales; level 3 upwards of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications

Framework (SCQF); or those HCSW whose role is delegated by a Registered Nurse

- ◆ nurse cadets.

More information can be found at RCN Online at [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk) or by telephoning RCN Direct on 0845 772 610.

### Cancelling and amending membership

It is important that the RCN has up-to-date details on members to maintain effective communications, and to ensure that payments and cover is current. Members can update their personal and contact details online at [www.rcn.org.uk/myrcn](http://www.rcn.org.uk/myrcn) . Alternatively, members should notify RCN Direct of changes to the following details:

- ◆ change of name, address or telephone number
- ◆ change of email address
- ◆ training completion date changes (students only)
- ◆ change of practice sector
- ◆ if their name is removed from the NMC Register
- ◆ unpaid leave, for example, maternity leave
- ◆ resignation, preferably with the reason so we can track reasons for leaving

- ◆ hours of work are below 37.5 hours per month or five weeks per year (or if they already work below this level and begin to work more than this)
- ◆ workplace details change
- ◆ plans to work overseas (contact RCN International Office for advice)
- ◆ retiring from nursing – options are to terminate membership or take out associate membership.

# Appendix

## Useful contacts

### RCN Accreditation Unit

20 Cavendish Square  
London W1G 0RN  
020 7647 3647  
accreditation@rcn.org.uk

### RCN Counselling Service

0854 769 7064  
counselling@rcn.org.uk

### RCN WING

Information and advice for ill,  
injured and disabled  
members  
0845 408 4392  
wing@rcn.org.uk

### RCN Direct

Copse Walk, Cardiff Gate  
Cardiff CF23 8XG  
0845 772 6100

### RCN Publishing Company Ltd

The Heights  
59-65 Lowlands Road  
Harrow-on-the-Hill  
Middlesex HA1 3AE  
020 8423 1066

### Nursing and Midwifery Council

23 Portland Place  
London W1N 3AF  
020 7637 7181  
www.nmc-uk.org

### Department of Health

Richmond House  
79 Whitehall,  
London SW1A 2NS  
020 7210 3000  
www.dh.gov.uk

### Northern Ireland

#### Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery/NIPEC

(formerly the National Board  
for Nursing, Midwifery and  
Health Visiting for Northern  
Ireland)  
Centre House  
79 Chichester Street  
Belfast BT1 4JE  
028 9023 8152  
www.nipec.n-i.nhs.uk

#### Northern Ireland Executive

Department of Health, Social  
Sciences & Public Safety  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont,  
Belfast BT4 3SJ  
028 9052 0500  
www.dhssni.gov.uk

### Scotland

#### NHS Education for Scotland

(formerly the National Board  
for Nursing, Midwifery and  
Health Visiting for Scotland)  
22 Queen Street  
Edinburgh EH2 1NT  
0131 226 7321  
enquiries@nes.scot.nhs.uk  
www.nes.scot.nhs.uk

#### Scottish Executive

Health Department  
St Andrew's House, Regent  
Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
0131 556 8400  
www.scotland.gov.uk

### Wales

Health of Wales Information  
Service  
www.wales.nhs.uk

#### The National Assembly Government for Wales

Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff CF99 1NA  
029 2089 8200  
www.wales.gov.uk

## Useful websites

### **Basic Skills Agency/Skills for Life**

The Basic Skills Agency is the national development organisation for literacy and numeracy in England and Wales, and contributes to the Government's Skills for Life strategy in England.

[www.basic-skills.org.uk](http://www.basic-skills.org.uk)

### **BBC Learning**

[www.bbc.co.uk/learning](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning)

### **Campaign for Learning**

The Campaign for Learning is a national charity which promotes learning. It also provides a range of information and resources to those participating in the annual learning at work day.

[www.campaignforlearning.org.uk](http://www.campaignforlearning.org.uk)

### **Department for Children, Schools and Families**

The Government department responsible for lifelong learning (formerly the DfES).

[www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)

### **Directgov**

Developed by the DfES and partner organisations to bring together information that will help adult learners make informed decisions about taking up learning.

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning)

### **learndirect**

learndirect offers a range of resources, including online courses in computers and self-development to improve maths and English skills.

[www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk)

[www.learndirectscotland.com](http://www.learndirectscotland.com)

### **NIACE (The National Organisation for Adult Learning)**

Providing information on the work carried out by NIACE to promote and support adult learning.

[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

### **RCN**

[www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk)

### **RCN Learning Zone**

[www.rcn.org.uk/learningzone](http://www.rcn.org.uk/learningzone)

### **Support4learning**

Signposts organisations and resources in key areas linked to careers, training and education.

[www.support4learning.org.uk](http://www.support4learning.org.uk)

### **TUC unionlearn**

[www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk)

# References

- ACAS (2003) *Code of Practice 3: Time-off for union duties and activities*, London: ACAS.
- Charities Aid Foundation (2007) *Directory of Grant Making Trusts*, Kent: CAF.
- Directory of Social Change (2007) *Educational Grants Directory*, London: DSC.
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- Macmillan Press (2007) *Grants Register*, London: Macmillan Press.
- NHS Employers (2005) *Agenda for Change: NHS terms and conditions of service handbook* (revised 2007), London: NHS Employers.
- Nursing & Midwifery Council (2002) *Code of professional conduct*, London: NMC.
- Nursing & Midwifery Council (2006) *PREP handbook*, London: NMC.
- Office for Public Sector Information (2002) *Employment Act 2002*, London: OPSI.
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## Disclaimer

This publication contains information, advice and guidance to help members of the RCN. It is intended for use within the UK but readers are advised that practices may vary in each country and outside the UK.

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[www.rcn.org.uk/direct](http://www.rcn.org.uk/direct)  
**0845 772 6100**

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