



## Your chance to make a difference – becoming an RCN representative

*“Our network of highly trained and professional RCN representatives is the lifeblood of the RCN. By becoming a representative, you can play a vital role in improving patient care and working conditions.”*

Dr Peter Carter, Chief Executive & General Secretary

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Would you welcome the chance to make a real difference to your patients, the working lives of yourself and your colleagues – and even the future of nursing care?

If your answer is 'yes', have you considered getting more involved in the RCN's day-to-day activities, by becoming an accredited local representative?

RCN members – who can be registered nurses or health care assistants – choose to become representatives for all kinds of reasons. These include the opportunity to:

- **expand your horizons** – learning new and transferable skills in communication and influencing for example, improving your knowledge and working with people you may not otherwise have met
- **challenge yourself** – by becoming involved in tasks outside your usual sphere of activity, such as influencing important decisions
- **boost your confidence** – through focusing on your own learning and development, with our specially tailored study programmes designed to enhance your expertise
- **provide support for other RCN members in the workplace** – making a difference to their working lives and to nursing.

“I really enjoy being a learning rep. I have not only helped to improve the knowledge and confidence of the staff I have supported, but also my own. Becoming a learning rep has helped me grow as a practitioner and as a person.”

**Jenny Jagus**, Team Leader and RCN Learning Representative,  
Hywel Dda NHS Trust

## Your chance to make a difference – becoming an RCN representative

While the work of an RCN representative is often stimulating and enjoyable, it's only fair to point out that it may also be personally challenging. But if you're willing to make a firm commitment to help achieve valuable improvements to the working lives of nurses and HCAs that ultimately benefits patients, then we would be delighted to hear from you.

In return, many of our representatives find that they benefit in ways they could never have foreseen. As RCN steward Leisa Oliver-Goodall of Imperial College Healthcare Trust (Charing Cross Hospital) says of her role: "It's very rewarding and gives me a real sense of achievement when I represent RCN members and get a good outcome. It has also enabled me to acquire additional skills such as organising, administration and IT skills. I have also written and contributed to policies to ensure that nurses' rights are maintained, improved or protected. Being selected as the Agenda for Change staff side lead by my fellow staff side colleagues was a real challenge but one I accepted and loved every minute of."



## As an RCN representative, you are:

- fully supported by RCN staff and by a network of other representatives throughout the UK
- specially trained, with your continuing learning and development needs met by the RCN's Learning and Development Institute, backed by RCN officers
- legally entitled to reasonable paid time off for your learning and development and to carry out your representative duties
- encouraged to access a specialist area on the RCN's website, which contains a wide range of resources, and a discussion zone
- kept up-to-date with news and information via your own monthly newsletter, *Activate*
- invited to attend national conferences and events
- entitled to a 25% discount off the member rate for RCN conferences organised solely by the RCN Events team
- eligible to receive a special RCN award that recognises your hard work and achievements.

“I really enjoy my role as a safety representative and find it very rewarding and fulfilling. I would encourage other nurses and HCAs to take on the role as it's good for you professionally, individually and organisation wide. The experience is real although challenging at times.”

**Catherine Ikeh**, Harm Minimisation Lead Nurse and Safety Representative, North East London Mental Health Trust

## Who are RCN representatives?

### **RCN stewards**

RCN stewards represent members on employment issues in the workplace, protecting rights and ensuring fair treatment. As an RCN steward, your role involves:

- preparing and presenting cases on behalf of members
- supporting, advising and representing members on a variety of issues, including grievances, job evaluation and equal opportunities
- contributing to the prevention and resolution of any workplace disputes
- establishing, maintaining and improving partnership arrangements with employers, bringing a positive influence to employment relations
- directing members towards the information and advice they need.

“I have recently been appointed as a centrally funded part-time staff side representative for my trust. This means there is a clear focus on staff side issues which ultimately leads to better patient care. The trust recognises the value of facilitating real partnership working and it is hoped that other employers will follow this lead.”

**Gordon Lees**, RCN Steward and Staff Side Chair,  
Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust

## RCN safety representatives

Working in a healthy and safe environment is crucial. As an RCN safety representative, your role involves:

- negotiating and representing the health and safety interests of RCN members at work
- obtaining and providing information and advice on health and safety issues for members
- encouraging others to follow health and safety procedures
- contributing to risk assessments and the control of risk in the workplace
- carrying out safety inspections
- representing the RCN on health and safety committees and taking action to create a positive safety culture at work
- working with employers to ensure compliance with health and safety legislation
- investigating potential hazards and making recommendations to prevent future accidents
- representing RCN members on matters related to workplace accidents or incidents.

“I took a lead in promoting the ‘You’re Not Alone’ campaign in Northern Ireland highlighting the increase on attacks on nurses. I’ve been able to take policy to the highest level – the Northern Ireland Assembly – and influence stakeholders across the Province. At a local level I sit on the Trust Safety Committee representing members within my own trust which gives the RCN a voice and the opportunity to influence working practices. Keeping staff safe is about keeping patients safe.”

**Robert Moore**, Safety Representative and Deputy Chair of the RCN Safety Representatives Committee, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

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## RCN learning representatives

Setting and pursuing learning goals can be challenging. RCN learning representatives support the learning and career development of our members.

As an RCN learning representative, your role involves:

- promoting the value of learning and training in the workplace
- supporting members to analyse, plan and manage their learning and training needs
- keeping up-to-date with learning opportunities, directing members to information, resources and support
- contributing to the development of a learning organisation
- supporting the development and implementation of a workplace learning strategy
- negotiating and supporting continuing professional development (CPD)
- promoting access to lifelong learning
- supporting local and national learning campaigns and initiatives.

“In my role as a learning rep I enjoy encouraging others to develop and giving them access to information regarding courses and funding. It is also useful for my own self development and lifelong learning by widening my network of people.”

**Muriel McNab**, Practice Development Coordinator and  
RCN Learning Representative, NHS Highland

## RCN student information officers

The RCN's student members have their own dedicated local RCN student information officers. They are on hand to signpost RCN nursing students towards sources of professional information, advice, support and representation. They also act as a contact point for the RCN, raising any areas of concern.

A nomination form is available at: [www.rcn.org.uk/development/students/getinvolved](http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/students/getinvolved)

## RCN representatives working in the independent sector

The RCN is recruiting an increasing number of stewards, safety representatives and learning representatives in the independent sector. Nursing in this sector presents its own unique demands. We need RCN representatives who understand the challenges of working here at first hand, and can make a vital contribution towards improving the day-to-day working lives of RCN members and their patients.

Our research involving independent sector nursing staff and managers demonstrates the value of this work, with RCN representatives held in high esteem. For example, members say that having their own representatives on the ground helps them to raise and resolve issues more speedily, improving working relationships through better communication.



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### The right training for the job

A UK-wide learning and development framework for RCN representatives was launched at RCN Congress 2008. Created in response to what RCN representatives and officers told us they need, the new pathways will ensure that training is consistent across all four countries.

However, in recognition that health services are structured differently in **Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales**, the RCN is developing specific learning and development programmes to meet the particular needs of our representatives in these countries.

In **England**, our comprehensive training is mapped against nationally agreed standards for trade union officers and representatives. The focus is on individual support, based upon self-analysis of your own learning needs. Learning is work-based, with guidance and advice from officers and experienced RCN representatives.

At the outset, newly recruited representatives study a foundation course. When you have demonstrated your competence, you can choose a specific module, which trains you to become an RCN steward, safety representative or learning representative. Once you become a more experienced representative, you can opt to take part in a masterclass or bespoke workshop.

“I became a steward because I believe that in order to support patients, nurses and HCAs also have to be supported. It empowers me to tackle issues affecting everyone and enables me to promote best practice.”

**Jane Bovey**, RCN Lead Steward, Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust

Wherever your training takes place, our overall aim is to help you develop your competency and confidence as an RCN representative, acquiring the knowledge and skills to effectively support members and represent the RCN.

For more information visit [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk)

## Interested and want to find out more?

To discover more about what's involved in becoming an RCN representative please complete the short form opposite. We'll contact you to arrange an informal chat that will help you decide whether it's the right choice for you. Don't worry – you don't have to make a firm commitment at this stage.



## Becoming an RCN representative

Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone

Email address

RCN membership no.

Date

Please return this form to the Reps Administrator at your local RCN office. You'll find contact details for your local RCN office in your RCN membership handbook or at: **www.rcn.org.uk**

### For internal use only

1. Enquiry form received by RCN office

on

(date) by

(name)

2. Discussion about the role to be carried out by

(name)

Role (RCN Officer or representative)

3. Information given to member - application form, date of next branch meeting, contact details for link representative, branch and local RCN office by

(name) on

(date)

Job title (RCN Officer or representative)

**OR** OSCAR record updated

on

(date) by

(name)

4. Completed and ratified application form received by RCN office

from branch on

(date)



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promotes excellence in practice and shapes  
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