



# RCN Foundation strategy 2021-2023

Supporting nursing, improving care

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# Introduction

**The RCN Foundation is an independent charity that is committed to supporting and strengthening nursing and midwifery to improve the health and wellbeing of the public.**

The charity was established in 2010 when the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) amended its legal structure to create an independent charity and a company limited by guarantee.

As a charity, the RCN Foundation exists to support *any* nurse, midwife or health care support worker across the UK, and not only those who are members of the RCN.

The Foundation has its own Board of Trustees. There are four positions on the Board for RCN members, enabling us to retain our strong connections with the RCN, whilst also maintaining our independence.

The Foundation's primary role is as a grantmaker which seeks to: influence the health and social care agenda; develop nursing practice to improve care; increase public understanding about nursing and the difference it makes; and support

individual members of the profession. In meeting these aims, the Foundation undertakes a number of charitable activities which broadly fall into the following areas:

- supporting individual members of the nursing and midwifery team by providing grants for hardship and education purposes
- investing in the nursing and midwifery professions to improve patient care. Our current focus is on the priority themes of care homes, children and young people's mental health, and learning disability; we also support nursing-led innovation and special projects that address current critical priorities
- championing the professions by raising the profile of nursing and midwifery, and public understanding of their contribution to improving the

nation's health; we also aim to support the health of the nursing and midwifery team with a particular current focus on mental health.

Together with the RCN, RCNi (the RCN's publishing company) and RCN Holdco Limited (which provides personal injury and other legal services), the Foundation is part of the RCN Group. The Group structure enables there to be better co-ordination and synergy between the four organisations, ensuring that they are able to optimise their expertise and to share best practice.

By working together, the RCN Group is unique in championing, supporting and developing the nursing profession worldwide. As the recognised and trusted voice of the whole nursing community, the Group's mission is to work in the best interests of the public to improve health and wellbeing.

# Our values



**The RCN Foundation is committed to supporting and strengthening nursing and midwifery to improve the health and wellbeing of the public.**

**Our values reflect and underpin everything that we do. They also guide our approach to working with our beneficiaries, partners and other key stakeholders.**

**Our values are:**

## **Be relevant for today and ready for tomorrow**

We will address the challenges faced by modern nursing and midwifery today but will also be prepared for what the future holds. Together with our partners, we will be ready and willing to act, embracing how things can change for the better.

## **Be focused on impact**

We will ensure that the needs of our beneficiaries are at the forefront of everything that we do and we will work to ensure that we achieve the very best outcomes for them. We will evaluate our achievements through measurable results.

## **Be accountable**

We will ensure prudent use of resources to achieve our goals. We will be responsible and transparent, and we will operate to the highest standards of corporate governance.

## **Be ambitious**

We will be creative and innovative. We will try new things and learn from them. We will celebrate achievements.

## **Be collaborative**

We will respect and value those we work with, ensuring that we listen to and learn from constructive dialogue. We will work with partners to leverage our charity and charitable strengths where common values and outcomes are shared.

# The current context for our work

**This strategy aims to continue the journey which the Foundation began in 2018, as set out in the three-year strategic plan which ran from 2018 to 2020. At that time, little did we know that the context for our work would change irrevocably during the final year of the plan.**

During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic touched the lives of people in all sectors, and in every part of the UK and beyond. With nursing and midwifery staff at the forefront of the response to the pandemic, our work to support these staff took on even more resonance. Whilst the broader challenges facing modern nursing and midwifery continue to exist, the pandemic brought into sharp focus many of the underlying issues within the health and care sectors. The pandemic also brought to the fore existing and deep-rooted societal inequalities.

As a consequence, mortality rates in the most deprived areas of the country were higher, as were those for some BAME communities, who were twice as likely to die from the virus as the White population, and for people with a learning disability, who were three times as likely to die.

Prior to the pandemic, the health care landscape for nursing and midwifery staff was already shaped by a number of factors including: real terms cuts in health spending; a social care system under extreme pressure from rising demand for care and falling public spending; and more people living longer, many with long-term conditions, learning disabilities, and mental health problems. However, with the addition of a global pandemic to contend with, these challenges have grown exponentially, and new challenges have emerged.

As a direct result of the pandemic, our support for nursing and midwifery in 2020 focused on financial hardship, the mental health and wellbeing of nurses and midwives, and research projects that focused on key issues that emerged. This response to the pandemic is likely to continue to varying degrees throughout the period of this strategy. A key aspect of this response is our ongoing commitment to respond flexibly to emerging and urgent needs over the next three years, thus ensuring that we address those areas that make the biggest impact on the professions and on patient care.

As the pandemic recedes, and the UK health and care systems begin to adapt to the 'new normal', some of the overarching transformations that were taking place within the health and care sectors are likely to accelerate and intensify. These include the shift

# The current context for our work

to maintaining health and wellbeing, and seeking ways in which to prevent, rather than simply treat, ill health; using digital technologies and social innovation to enhance the delivery of care; and undertaking a collaborative approach so that patients are at the centre of a 'wrap around' service.

Nursing and midwifery are pivotal to the delivery of this agenda – providing leadership, promoting excellence and developing innovative approaches to care. Therefore, the Foundation's role in supporting their work has never been more important.

In taking forward the strategic journey which began in 2018, the Foundation will continue to focus on our two key priority areas of nursing-led interventions that support children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing, and learning disability nursing. Over the next three

years, the Foundation will implement a robust programme of grant-making in these areas, ensuring that it achieves clear outcomes and impact. We will also seek to embed the innovation agenda throughout our work, asking those whom we fund to demonstrate and articulate their innovation.

Throughout the period of the strategy, there will be a particular focus on supporting newly qualified/early career nurses and midwives. The Foundation aims to prioritise support for this cohort of registrants through all of the work that is carried out. The workforce challenges highlighted by the pandemic have also underlined the importance of focusing on and supporting these staff.

Principles of equality, diversity and inclusion will be a mainstay throughout all of the work undertaken by the Foundation and across all areas

of grant-making. A proactive approach will be taken to embedding these principles in our work, and we will expect all those with whom we work to demonstrate their active commitment to achieving these aims. As Professor Michael Marmot acknowledged: "to emerge from this pandemic in a healthier state, we need commitment... to social justice and putting equity of health and wellbeing at the heart of all policymaking."

In delivering this strategy, the Foundation will continue to highlight and champion the contribution made by nursing and midwifery to improving the health and wellbeing of the public. Our role as a grant-maker and our position within the RCN Group mean that the Foundation is uniquely placed to support and strengthen the professions, and make a positive impact on the wider health and social care agenda over the next three years and beyond.

# Our strategic aims

**To help us to deliver our strategy, four strategic aims will be pursued over the course of the next three years. From 2021 to 2023 our focus will be on funding nursing-led initiatives that contribute to healthier communities, and innovative projects which transform the care experiences of patients.**

We will also be supporting the nursing and midwifery team to develop their knowledge and skills. Ultimately this will transform service delivery and provide high quality patient care in the rapidly evolving health and social care context.

Additionally, we will continue to support the most vulnerable members of the nursing and midwifery community, those facing hardship as a result of illness, violence, disability or financial constraints, whilst also beginning to focus on the self-care needs of the nursing and midwifery team themselves.

Measuring outcomes and learning from the work we do are central to our relevance to nursing and health care. We will develop an impact measurement framework for the different aspects of our work which will aim to capture the difference we are making in a number of ways.

Ultimately, our strategic aims will ensure that the Foundation continues to remain 'relevant today and ready for tomorrow'.

- 1. Supporting the nursing and midwifery community in times of need**
- 2. Investing in the future of nursing and midwifery through our programme of education grants**
- 3. Funding nursing-led projects that improve patient care, health and wellbeing**
- 4. Increasing public understanding of the contribution that nursing and midwifery make to society**

# Strategic aim 1: Supporting the nursing and midwifery community in times of need



**Supporting those who care for the nation's health, particularly when they are facing their own challenges, remains an important part of our work. Increasing pressures on nursing mean that the safety net provided by this strand of our work has never been more important.**

## How we will do it:

- continue to provide a benevolent service to support the most vulnerable members of the nursing and midwifery professions
- respond to emerging challenges facing nurses, midwives, and health care support workers who are in need, using evidence to support proposals for development
- target hard to reach groups to ensure that they are taking up the services on offer, such as those from deprived backgrounds, people who have taken a career break and older nursing and midwifery staff
- continue to improve data collection and analysis about the impact of the service and communicate this widely
- set aside funds to develop self-care projects which focus on the mental health and wellbeing of the nursing and midwifery team themselves, identifying the clear outcomes expected from funding this work, and ensuring that any grants are based on evidence of need.

# Strategic aim 2: Investing in the future of nursing and midwifery through our programme of education grants

**Patients deserve the best possible care delivered by well-trained nursing and midwifery professionals. The profession has a duty of care to patients to keep up to date with new developments, and to use their knowledge and clinical skills to transform the care patients receive.**

This means proactively seeking self-development opportunities and sharing learning. In the current climate, access to such learning and development opportunities for nurses, midwives and health care support workers has never been more important. Therefore funding the nursing and midwifery community to develop and enhance their own learning, and to disseminate best practice, remains a key priority.

## How we will do it:

- review our current programme of education grants to ensure that they remain fit for purpose, meet the current and future needs of the nursing and midwifery team and respond effectively to the changing education landscape
- develop and implement new education grants in a phased way, ensuring that they are evaluated. We will seek partners with whom to develop these new programmes
- continue to implement the single grants programme, particularly utilising the Customer Relationship Management system to provide a more seamless service to grant applicants
- continue to develop an RCN Foundation alumni network of those who have received grants and bursaries
- support the development and roll out of an advanced practice education programme in neurological rehabilitation and care.



# Strategic aim 3: Funding nursing-led projects that improve patient care, health and wellbeing

**Nurses, midwives and other health care professionals play a vital role in improving the public's health and providing high quality care for individuals, families and communities. The integration of health and social care, and the consequent changes to models of delivery, mean that nursing and midwifery staff have to innovate to ensure that they deliver effective patient care.**

We will support the profession by funding nursing-led projects that both champion and celebrate nursing, whilst improving the public's health. We will also disseminate the outcomes of the work we fund to support healthier communities, improving patient care and experiences across the UK and internationally. In developing our grants programme, the Foundation will identify, support and champion nursing-led innovation, highlighting the contribution that nursing and midwifery make, whether in a clinical or research setting. As health and social care evolves, different models of service create new opportunities. We will aim to support the profession to be innovative in how it responds, developing new ways of providing person- and community-centred care.

## How we will do it:

- develop two new grant-making programmes in our priority areas. Our key priorities will be nursing-led interventions that improve children and young people's health and wellbeing; and learning disability nursing
- develop partnerships with a range of other organisations and funders in order to develop sector-wide approaches to public health challenges
- ensure that our funding spans both clinical research and practice development projects
- build in the financial capability to respond to emerging and urgent issues of importance that affect nursing and/or health care
- Respond to themes and issues that emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic ensuring that any funded work is underpinned by evidence of need.

# Strategic aim 4: Increasing public understanding of the contribution nursing and midwifery make to society

**The nursing and midwifery professions have grown enormously in breadth and depth since the days of Florence Nightingale. Their scope of practice, autonomy and expertise have all developed significantly. However, there still remains a lack of understanding and plethora of stereotypes about the role and function of nursing and midwifery staff.**

Increasing understanding of the role, contribution and breadth of the nursing profession amongst the public will therefore be a key aim that underpins all of our activities. We will not only support specific activities that achieve this aim, but also ensure that we disseminate outcomes from our work that increase awareness and understanding of how nursing and midwifery contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of the nation.

## How we will do it:

- identify a range of projects for funding over the course of the strategy that are designed to increase public understanding of the contribution nursing makes to society. These might be standalone projects or ones that are part of a project with a broader focus but which nevertheless increases understanding.
- hold an annual RCN Foundation Lecture, that focuses on topical issues, and which demonstrates the impact of nursing and midwifery.



# Looking ahead with confidence

**As well as measuring the impact of our work on our beneficiaries and wider stakeholders, we will also review our own performance and aim to strengthen our future financial sustainability. It is clear to us that an effective organisation is better placed to achieve its aims and make a positive impact on its beneficiaries.**

Our aim is to implement an ambitious programme of grant-giving activities during this three-year period. This will require a robust income generation plan underpinned by an effective communications strategy. Income generation and communications will be important pillars on which much of our work will depend, and will therefore be given focus and energy over the next three years.

Ultimately, as the Foundation prospers and grows, we will be better able to deliver on our purpose to support and strengthen nursing and midwifery to improve the health and wellbeing of the public in a sustainable and long-term way.





## We want to hear from you

Feel free to contact us and see how we can help:

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