



Ignite, Inspire, Aspire: Our Vision to Transform Lives

Strategic Plan 2024-28



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Introduction and the context for our work

Supporting and strengthening nursing and midwifery is critical to improving the health of the UK.

Since 2010, we have seen the transformational impact of the support provided by the RCN Foundation – transformational for nursing and midwifery staff, and transformational to the care that they provide every day to individuals and communities.

This strategic plan is about continuing on that journey of transformation – for our organisation, for the individuals that we support, and for the communities in which we live and work. Over the next five years, our ambitious strategy will see an increase in our support across the three core areas of our work – hardship, education and research.

The landscape for nursing, midwifery and health and social care: the more things change, the more they stay the same

The seismic events of the past few years have indelibly changed the perception of health and social care generally, and of nursing and midwifery more specifically.

The COVID-19 pandemic touched the lives of individuals and communities 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 greater resonance. The pandemic also brought into sharp focus many of the existing and deep-rooted health inequalities in the UK, with higher rates of mortality in the most deprived areas of the country, as well as for sections of society such as those from global majority communities and people with a learning disability.

Post-pandemic, health and care systems faced seemingly unending demand, staff shortages and chronic burnout amongst the workforce, all of which have been exacerbated by a cost of living crisis described by former Prime Minister Gordon Brown as “a humanitarian crisis that Britain hasn’t seen in decades. As living costs continue to skyrocket families on the brink of making ends meet cannot bridge the gap.”¹

Health care has been contending with longer waiting times for diagnosis and treatment on top of the backlog

caused by the pandemic, as well as the impact of increasing mental ill health on services that were already under pressure. Meanwhile, developing sustainable solutions for the social care system remains a challenge.² Writing in the British Medical Journal, Professor Sir Chris Ham concluded that the NHS in England is facing unprecedented challenges which will require the government to do two things: “*first to deal with the backlog of both physical and mental health care that the pandemic has caused, and second to create a system of health and care that tackles both the health inequalities and the other weaknesses that COVID-19 has exposed.*”³

Against the backdrop of a struggling health and care system is the challenge of staffing shortages. In 2023, there were over 40,000 vacant registered nursing posts (full-time equivalent) in the NHS in England alone, not counting those in social care or public health services working outside of the NHS.⁴

Workforce challenges across health and social care are also prevalent within the devolved nations of the UK. In Scotland, 10% of all registered nursing posts across the country are empty⁵ whilst Northern Ireland has seen a reduction in student nursing places against a backdrop of health and social care staff remaining the lowest paid in the UK in 2023⁶. In Wales, nurse shortages have risen by almost 60% and reliance on agency staff has increased.⁷

The impact of staff shortages in some fields of nursing and across different settings is even more profound. For example, there was a 38% decrease in the number of learning disability nurses between September 2010 and September 2019. In adult social care in England, registered nurse has been one of the only job roles to see a significant decrease (30 per cent) since 2012/13.⁸

There continues to be an increased reliance on internationally educated nurses as one route to addressing nurse shortages in the UK. However, with the International Council of Nurses estimating a global shortage of some 13 million nurses⁹, this is an unsustainable approach in the long-term.

The incidence of stress and burnout within nursing and midwifery is well documented and continues to grow. The results of the 2022 NHS Staff Survey highlighted that 50% of all registered nurses and midwives felt unwell due to work-related stress in the previous 12 months.

1 *Is Cost of Living Support Enough?*, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University, 2022

2 The challenges facing the NHS in England in 2021, Chris Ham, BMJ, 2020

3 Ibid

4 NHS Vacancy Statistics England, April 2015 - March 2023, Experimental Statistics, NHS Digital, May 2023

5 Scotland faces ‘exodus of nursing staff’ as thousands quit the profession, Daily Record, 13 February 2023

6 NI health workers left with ‘de facto pay freeze’, BBC News, 17 October 2023



And whilst 38% of registered nurses and midwives reported feeling burnt out because of their work sometimes, another 30% felt burnt out often, and 10% reported feeling burnt out *always*. Furthermore, nearly one in every ten (9%) registered nurses and midwives who had considered leaving their current job, reported that they would want to move to a job outside health care.¹⁰

Looking at midwifery specifically, the challenges for the profession and for maternity care are complex and varied, with staffing shortages also a key feature. In the results of its 2021 annual member experiences of work survey, the Royal College of Midwives warned of a ‘midwife exodus’. Over half of midwives surveyed said they were considering leaving their job as a midwife with 57% saying they would leave the NHS in the next year. Of those midwives who had either left or were considering leaving, 84% were concerned about staffing levels and 67% were not satisfied with the quality of care they were able to deliver.¹¹

The challenges in relation to poorly performing maternity services, and the measures put in place to tackle them, have been well documented. Outside of this, maternity care faces other challenges. A report on Black maternal health, published by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee in April 2023, reported that there are “glaring and persistent disparities in outcomes for women depending on their ethnicity” and that maternal mortality for Black women is currently almost four times higher than for White women.¹²

The report also highlighted that these disparities have existed and been documented for at least 20 years, but only received mainstream attention and Government action since around 2018. The report concluded that the reasons for this disparity are not fully understood and may include pre-existing conditions and co-morbidities, socio-economic factors including deprivation; and factors impacting on the care that women received, including ignorance, bias, micro-aggressions and racism.

Across the nursing and midwifery workforce, there is increasing diversity due to growth in new registrations from internationally educated professionals and increasing diversity in domestic entrants. In its *Spotlight on Nursing and Midwifery Report 2023*, the Nursing and Midwifery Council highlighted the racism and discrimination experienced by staff from the global majority, stating that “*the health and care sector is failing to provide a just, inclusive environment in which all Black and minority ethnic nurses, midwives and nursing associates can thrive and progress.*” Ultimately, the report concluded that “*racism is affecting the quality of care and retention.*”¹³

Looking ahead, the Health Foundation predicts that 9.1 million people in England are projected to be living with a major illness by 2040, an increase from almost 1 in 6 to nearly 1 in 5 of the adult population. Most of this rise is the result of an ageing population – as life expectancy increases and the baby-boomer generation reaches older age. This will have profound implications for the NHS, social care and other public services.¹⁴

The report concludes that “*the report’s projections underline the need for a long-term plan to reform, modernise and invest in the NHS. They also demand a bold, new approach that invests in the nation’s health and wellbeing, placing it on a par with increasing economic growth and tackling climate change as one of the defining challenges of our time.*”¹⁵

The synopsis above highlights just some of the critical issues which form the context for our work. Overall, they paint a picture of the on-going and increasing need for the Foundation to support nursing and midwifery staff, both personally and professionally, so that they are at the forefront of protecting and improving the nation’s health and wellbeing. With challenges for the health and care sector likely to grow, it will be vital for the Foundation to gear up for an inevitable growth in demand for support.

7 Nurse vacancies soar almost 60% in Wales leaving staff ‘exhausted’, Nursing Standard, 22 September 2023

8 The Courage of Compassion, The King’s Fund, 2020

9 The Global Nursing shortage and Nurse Retention, ICN, 2022

10 NHS Staff Survey, 2022

11 Annual Member Experiences of Work Survey, Royal College of Midwives, 2021

12 Black maternal health, House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2023

13 Spotlight on Nursing and Midwifery Report 2023, Nursing and Midwifery Council 2023

14 Health in 2040: projected patterns of illness in England, The Health Foundation, 2023

15 Ibid



From grant-maker to change-maker?

In 2020/21, grant-making by the top 300 UK Foundations grew to £3.7bn. In addition, 57% of these increased their grant-making in 2020/21 in real-terms.¹⁶

This growth in spending was seen even though total income fell by 10% in real terms in 2020/21 to £3.8bn. Voluntary income decreased by 9% to £2.1bn and investment income fell by 14% to £1.1bn. In part, this growth in spending was a commitment by Foundations to supporting individuals and communities in a time of national crisis. The top 300 Foundations also developed dedicated approaches for responding to beneficiary need during the COVID-19 pandemic – collaborating, pooling funds and flexing their grant-making.

The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) also noted a similar trend, with many funders making more resources available, funding more flexibly and increasing collaboration across the sector. CAF also noted the importance of recognising longer term issues. It highlighted that issues of climate change, racial justice and tackling levels of inequality have been front and centre in the public consciousness over the last couple of years. CAF noted that *“like everyone else, civil society organisations and their funders have taken note and are working on solutions.”*¹⁷

These trends were reflected in the experiences of the RCN Foundation during this period. We increased our spending, some of it funded from reserves, and our approach to our grant-making was flexed to meet the vastly changed circumstances in which we, and our beneficiaries, found ourselves as a result of the pandemic.

In adopting this approach, we turned from grant-maker to change-maker, ensuring that we transformed the support we offered to enable nursing and midwifery staff to continue their efforts to fight the pandemic. Over a five-month period during the pandemic, our emergency COVID-19 Support Fund made individual grants to over 3,000 staff, that were equivalent in value to our overall annual spend. In doing so, we adhered to the adage that ‘the real power of money is the power to give it away’.

Looking at the charity sector more broadly, there are a number of key trends that will impact on the work of charities in 2023 and beyond.

The cost of living crisis and soaring inflation have irrevocably changed the landscape for charities and their beneficiaries, and their impact looks to be long-term. At the same time as charities faced increased costs in terms of energy and consumables, they also faced a rise in demand for support from beneficiaries who were also experiencing the same issues.¹⁸ Alongside the cost of living crisis, there has also been a ‘cost of giving’ crisis with 1.6million less people giving to charity in 2021 than in 2020.¹⁹

In its November 2022 update on the UK’s economic and fiscal outlook, the Office of Budget Responsibility predicted that rising prices would erode real wages and reduce living standards by 7% over the next two financial years. This could significantly impact individual giving and make acquiring new donors more challenging.²⁰

Keeping up the pace on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) remains another challenge for the sector. Workplace discrimination remains a key issue. Research from the Resolution Foundation found that 21% of people from global majority communities said they had faced workplace discrimination because of their ethnicity alone in the last year, and 15% of disabled people had faced discrimination on the basis of disability.²¹

As well as demonstrating our commitment to upholding principles of EDI within our own work, approach and organisational culture, we remain firmly committed to challenging discrimination in all its forms for the communities we serve. Our beneficiaries remain at the heart of all we do, and we will continue to ensure that their needs drive our work.

Finally, climate change remains firmly on the agenda for charities and grant-makers, with a shift in the debate from whether climate change is real, to what needs to be done about it. Charities will need to map out the actions they need to take to reach net-zero themselves, as well as having a better understanding of the support they will need to provide to their beneficiaries to address climate change.

¹⁶ Foundation Giving Trends 2022, ACF, 2023

¹⁷ Trends that could impact the charity landscape in 2022, CAF, 2023

¹⁸ The Road Ahead 2023: the ongoing impact of cost of living, NCVO, 2023

¹⁹ The cost of living crisis and the impact on UK charities, Charity Link, 2023

²⁰ The Road Ahead 2023: the ongoing impact of cost of living, NCVO, 2023

²¹ Policing prejudice: Enforcing anti-discrimination laws in the workplace, Resolution Foundation, 2022

Nursing and midwifery staff have a critical role to play in helping to deliver UN climate goals. Patrice K. Nicholas, Director of the Centre for Climate Change, Climate Justice and Health at the Massachusetts General Hospital Institute of Health Professions states that *“as the largest group of health professionals worldwide, the nursing profession has a key responsibility in assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation regarding impacts on health in a climate-changing world.”*²² She goes on to highlight the public health impact of climate change caused by, for example, extreme weather events, air pollution, waterborne diseases, mental health, and allergies and respiratory conditions. She also acknowledges the detrimental impact to overall health on some populations: *“Black, indigenous, and people of colour, as well as low-income communities, are disproportionately affected and experience systematically higher exposure to health-threatening climate conditions.”*²³ Tackling this issue will therefore also contribute to addressing the health inequality agenda.

In the BMJ, Patricia Butterfield, Jeanne Leffers and Maribel Díaz Vásquez state that *“nurses moved early and eagerly to advocate action to resist climate change and are well positioned to achieve much more.”*²⁴ They argue that as a trusted profession, and one that is close to the people most vulnerable to climate change, they are well placed to affect change. They offer a number of recommendations for putting this into practice, two of which may be pertinent to the Foundation and its work. These are first, to accelerate change by moving or *“leapfrogging”* nurses into leadership positions; and secondly, to give nurses and students the skills they need to *“enact climate protective actions.”* They conclude that *“to be successful they will need basic training in environmental health problems, a modest project budget, and ongoing professional mentoring.”*²⁵

Listening to our beneficiaries

This strategic plan has been co-created with nursing and midwifery staff. As part of the development of the plan, we sought views and feedback from nursing and midwifery staff about what was important to them, and what they thought the Foundation's future priorities should be.

A broad range of individuals from across the UK, and in different field and settings, were included in the co-creation process. These included, but were not limited to, nurses in all four fields, midwives, nurses and midwives in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, RCN Foundation Alumni (education grant recipients), nursing students, Healthcare Support Workers and staff in social care.

Through the discussions, over 20 themes/areas of importance were highlighted. An exercise to identify areas of convergence was undertaken. As a result, the following were identified as the most common issues arising from the discussions. They are listed in order of the greatest prominence given to them through the feedback.

Education and learning activities

The continued need to support our education activities and how they might be further developed was identified. There was strong support for continuing to fund education activities in general and Masters' modules in particular. This was raised in a number of different ways including citing the ever-decreasing funding from the NHS and the need to invest in advanced practice. The funding for dissertation modules being scarce was also specifically highlighted, as was the Foundation being seen as a vital source of funding for this specific area of education.

Many of the England alumni focus group who had undertaken an MSc in Advanced Practice explained that they were *“funded by the NHS to do the first two years but had to find funding for the final dissertation.”* There was also feedback on suggested new

²² The role of nursing in climate change and public health, NurseJournal, 20 February 2023
²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Nursing's pivotal role in global climate action, theBMJ, 14 June 2021
²⁵ Ibid.

developments in relation to our education funding. This included the production of bite sized webinars/ online training sessions which could provide up to date information on the latest research and evidence based best practice on different issues. There was also a suggestion that the Foundation should consider funding short-term, non-university based professional courses that provided key skills, for example in relation to leadership.

The issue of education and learning opportunities not being easily accessible to Health Care Support Workers, and the impact of this on career development and progression, was also highlighted. The sentiment expressed was that support for Healthcare Support Workers was often “an afterthought”, and that they are a part of the workforce that were often “unseen and unheard” (Chair, RCN Nursing Support Workers Committee).

Finally in terms of developing our education grants offer, there was a suggestion to develop a repository of the outcomes of the work that has been funded through the Foundation’s education grants, and that this could be hosted on the Foundation’s website.

Mental health and wellbeing of staff

This issue was cited consistently as being of critical importance. Low morale and burnout were two specific issues that were mentioned, both of which had been exacerbated by the pandemic. A link was also made to retention.

Burnout was identified by one participant who said: *“there is the massive threat of staff burnout. Prior to COVID, burnout wasn’t much of a conversation between staff, some did suffer the effects however since COVID this has become a far more talked about topic even out with the health system. Staff do not feel valued the same which is a terrible shame, but I feel this is a nationwide issue”* (education grant alumnus, Scotland).



Research and Quality Improvement

Themes that emerged in relation to research included the need to focus funding on quality improvement projects; more support for research activities; and finding ways of developing a research culture within the professions. One suggestion was that the Foundation could act as a 'hothouse' for early career researchers through the funding it provides.

One education grant alumnus stated that their master's dissertation "was a research protocol – however I am now unable to complete the actual research set out in the protocol."

Delivering quality improvement projects was also highlighted as being appealing across the workforce. There was feedback that the Healthcare Support Workers workforce was more likely to respond to activities labelled as 'quality improvement' rather than 'research'.

Leadership and career progression

The feedback on leadership was focused on the need to access support earlier in an individual's career. There was also feedback that leadership training should start at the pre-registration stage. Career pathways for health care support workers and Band 5 nurses were also seen as important aspects of development.

"Another key area for the profession seems to be offering progression opportunities for those in band 5 nursing roles. Could this be explored in terms of research or funding towards staff development?" (education grant alumnus, Scotland).

Retention

Retention within both professions came up consistently. Many underlying issues were cited and some of these have been highlighted above in different ways; for example, citing the Foundation's education grants as a positive contributor for retention, and mental ill health/low morale/burnout as a negative contributor.

A pertinent comment made by one participant on the midwifery forum was that "people don't leave a job, they leave an environment".

Care for older people/social care

Participants' feedback was that this issue warranted continued ongoing support from the Foundation. A focus was needed on raising the profile of social care nursing. The lack of beds in the social care sector and its impact on the acute sector were cited as a key system-wide issue.

An education grant alumnus stated that "there needs to be a focus on elderly care – 75% of inpatients are older adults".

With 40% of the social care workforce being from global majority communities, discrimination was cited as an issue that faced this workforce.

Support for midwifery

There was a positive response to the Foundation's grants being open to midwives as well as nurses, but feedback was that this was not always well understood. Maternity support workers were identified as being specifically in need of support. A member of RCN Midwifery Forum stated that "there is no Foundation Degree for them they pick up training ad hoc, yet they are fundamental to maternity care".

Looking to the future

The next five years are likely to be a time of national and global challenge and change. We are living in a time of significant economic uncertainty, the realised impact of climate change, and a growing socio-economic divide. At the heart of this, we remain committed to responding with integrity, compassion and creativity to the challenges faced by our beneficiaries and, through them, those for whom they care.

In a climate of uncertainty and change, holding true to our purpose, *to support and strengthen nursing and midwifery, to improve the health and wellbeing of the public*, has never been more important. This strategic plan will aim to realise that purpose over the coming period.



Our approach, activities and ethos

The RCN Foundation is led by our purpose and values.

We hold true to our charitable objectives which are the cornerstone of our work, and which underpin our approach, activities and ethos.

As a charity and grant-maker, we seek to practically deliver our charitable objectives in a number of ways, including:

- Supporting individual members of the nursing and midwifery teams by providing grants for financial hardship and education activities
- Investing in the future of the professions by funding nursing- and midwifery-led projects
- Championing the professions by raising their profile and enabling the better understanding of their contribution to improving the nation's health.

Our purpose

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

Our values

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

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 evaluate our impact through measurable results. 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.

Be accountable

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

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

Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

The RCN Foundation is committed to ensuring that principles of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) underpin our approach to our governance, activities, staff and beneficiaries. We know that equity, diversity and inclusion strengthen the work that we do and lead to better outcomes for our beneficiaries, and greater societal impact.

Our ambition is that the RCN Foundation aspires to be a champion of equity, diversity, inclusion and human rights, and recognises the value of being a diverse, fair and inclusive employer. As a grant-making charity, the RCN Foundation aspires to work towards creating an inclusive culture within which our beneficiaries and the wider public can participate, contribute and thrive without fear of discrimination, barriers and exclusion.

We recognise that there is a profound relationship between inequality and health. Through our work and the way in which we operate, we aim to respond to, and positively address, the impact of health inequalities and their adverse effect on individuals and communities.

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The Strategic Plan 2024-28

The challenges presented by the current climate make the period ahead an important one for the RCN Foundation. Our response to the issues and circumstances facing nursing, midwifery, health and social care needs to be clear, ambitious and impactful.

This is why over the next five years, we will be stepping up our support in the three core areas of our work – hardship, education and learning, and research and innovation.

There remains a need to support the most vulnerable members of the nursing and midwifery communities – those facing hardship as a result of illness, violence, disability or financial constraints. We will enhance our provision by offering those that need it, a sustainable pathway beyond their current challenges. We will also fund key initiatives which focus on the health and wellbeing of nursing and midwifery staff, identifying the clear outcomes expected from this work.

Through our co-creation exercise, support for education and learning activities was identified by nursing and midwifery staff themselves as being their most important priority. They told us that such support not only develops them personally and professionally, leading to improved care for their patients; it also helps to retain them in their roles by providing them with renewed motivation.

We will widen access to education and learning opportunities for nursing and midwifery staff by developing partnerships with individuals and organisations who share our ethos and values.

Research and innovation, and their contribution to enhancing evidence-based practice, are integral to the provision of high quality care. Having already developed a robust body of funded research, and identified where we can add the most value, the RCN Foundation is well placed to respond to the nursing and midwifery research agenda.

We will set out our approach in a new research and innovation strategy which will underpin, and contribute to the overall delivery of, this strategic plan. As well as focusing on what research we will fund, we will also set out where and how we can add most value by building the research capacity for nursing- and midwifery-led research across health and social care.

Whilst delivering an ambitious programme of grant-making and funded activity within the parameters of this strategic plan, we will continue to remain responsive and reactive to the ever-changing wider landscape. If nothing else, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that where an urgent need arises that is seemingly outside of this strategic plan, we need to be ready to respond to it.



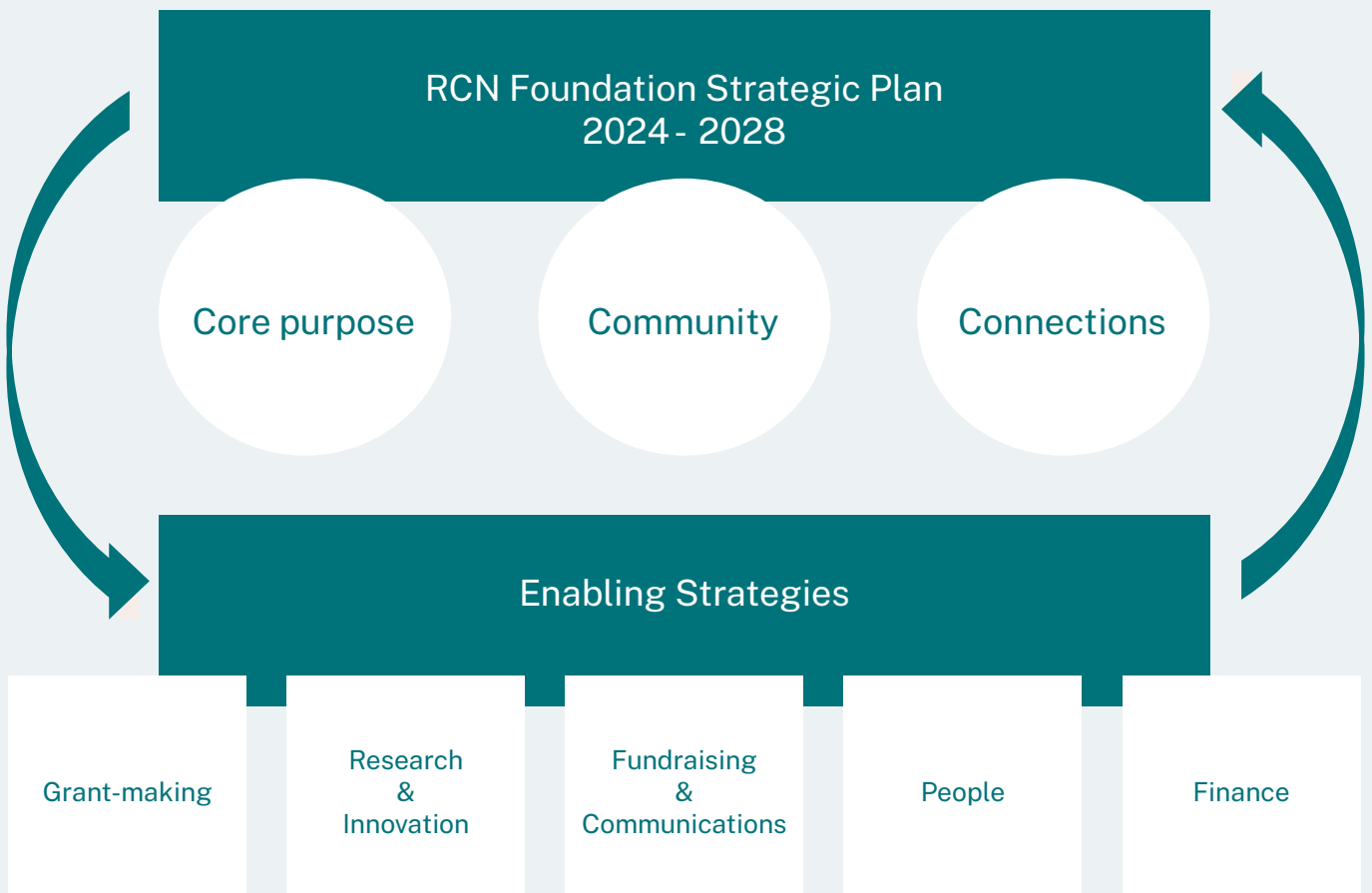
We will also ensure that our funded activities meet a clearly identified need, are of exceptional quality and have defined outputs which can be widely disseminated. Finally, we will ensure that the voices of nursing and midwifery, and of those with lived experience, are reflected throughout all our work.

This strategic plan will coalesce round three broad themes: **core purpose, community and connections**. Principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, and addressing health inequalities, will run as ‘golden threads’ across all the work that we will deliver.

Underpinning our strategic plan will be a number of enabling strategies – grant-making, research and innovation, fundraising and communications, people and finance – which will provide the Foundation with a firm bedrock from which to deliver the transformation that is needed.

Delivering this plan will not be easy. With uncertainty in the external environment, growing pressures on health and care systems, and a nursing and midwifery workforce facing immense personal and professional challenges, creating the transformation that is required to improve lives and communities will be a demanding ask. Yet it is precisely because of these challenges that we need to pursue our strategic aims with vigour – we owe it to our beneficiaries to do so.

In the face of these tumultuous headwinds, our unwavering priority is to ensure that nursing and midwifery staff receive the support they need to provide the very best care for patients, residents and families. This strategic plan sets out a clear direction of travel for the Foundation to do just that. We will navigate the external challenges ahead to strengthen and develop our work, so that we are able to continue to champion the nursing and midwifery professions and ensure that they succeed and thrive.



Core purpose

We will renew our efforts to support and strengthen nursing and midwifery, to improve the health and wellbeing of the public.

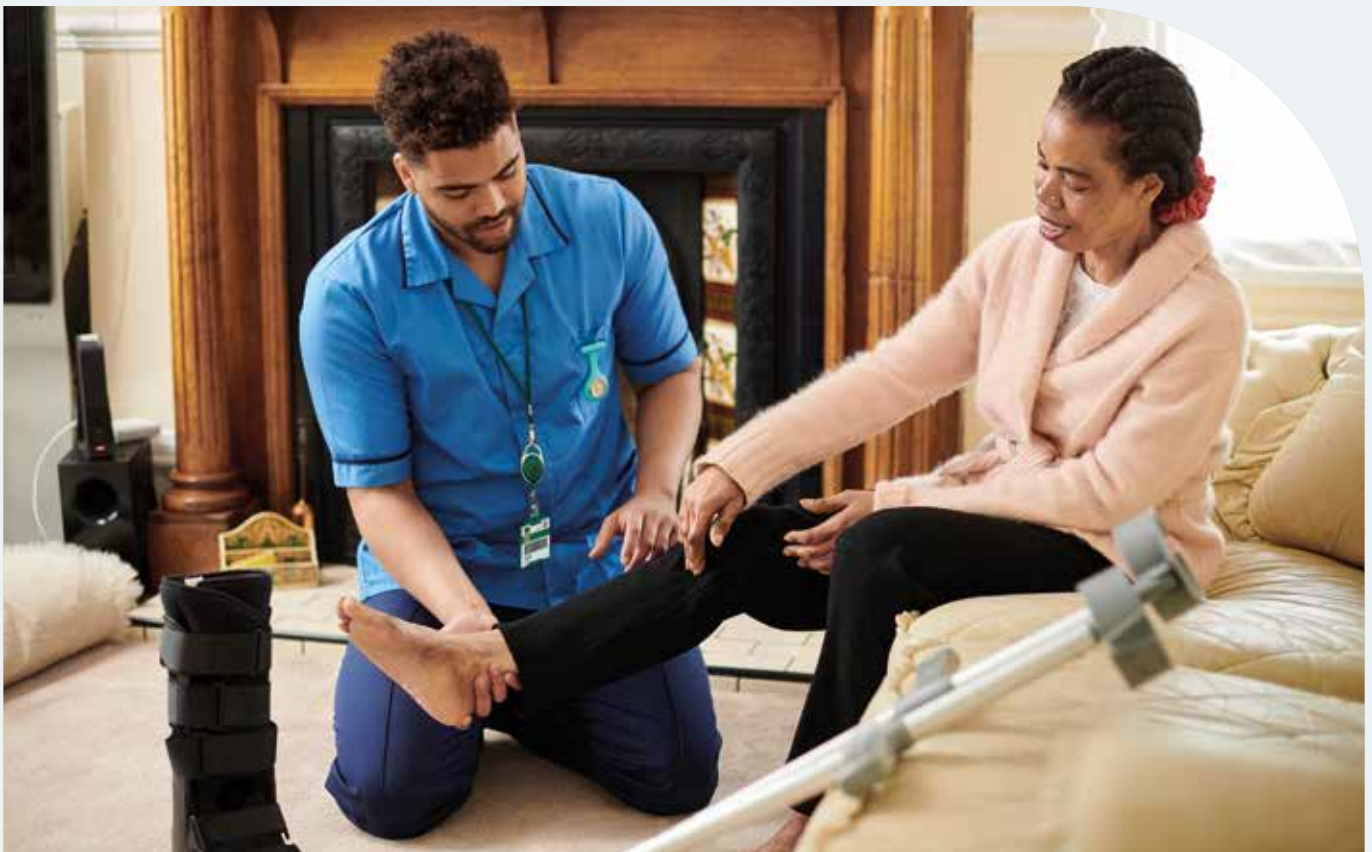
To help us to deliver this plan, we will pursue a number of strategic objectives over the next five years. Our focus will continue to be on aiding those of our beneficiaries who find themselves facing financial hardship, but also on supporting initiatives that focus on the wider issue of the health and care of the nursing and midwifery teams.

We will also step up our efforts to fund education and learning, assisting individuals to innovate, develop their knowledge, skills and expertise, and ultimately provide outstanding care. Developing leaders across the

professions, at all levels and in all settings, will need to be a tangible outcome from this work.

We will also set out an ambitious research and innovation strategy, led and delivered by nurses and midwives themselves. The aim of the strategy will be to widen and embed a research culture within the professions, creating a new generation of nursing and midwifery researchers. Tackling health inequalities, developing new ways of addressing national health and care challenges, and transforming the care experiences of patients and residents will be at the heart of our research and innovation work.

We will build on the robust impact measurement framework that we have developed, ensuring that our work continues to have tangible and meaningful benefit for our beneficiaries, reaches the right audiences to effect positive change, and ultimately improves outcomes for patients and residents. Translating



research into practice will be an important aspiration for this work.

Our overall strategic aims for the period ahead will contribute to achieving our core purpose and will continue to be concentrated on our key areas of work – hardship, education and learning, and research and innovation. However, the activities and details underpinning these objectives have been informed by our response to the external environment and the views of nursing and midwifery staff gathered through the co-creation exercise.

The strategic plan will take a holistic approach to two specific issues – EDI and retention. Rather than have a specific strategic aim related to these two issues, we will ensure that addressing these issues is embedded into all the work we do.

Discrimination and racism faced by staff across health and social care remains a prevalent, widespread and growing problem. As highlighted by the NMC, this has a detrimental impact on the care that people receive. We will therefore establish EDI targets across all our grant-making, identifying where there are challenges, and putting in place measures to address them.

Retention within nursing and midwifery is a key national challenge, something which has been underlined by the review of the external landscape and the experiences of our beneficiaries. It is an issue with which health systems across the UK continue to grapple. As an individual grant-maker we will not be able to resolve this challenge. Our approach therefore will be to ensure that a retention ‘lens’ is applied to all our activities by demonstrating and articulating clearly how our work contributes to the retention agenda. By funding the activities in this strategic plan, our aim will be to develop, motivate and ultimately retain the nursing and midwifery staff so vitally needed in the UK.

Strategic aim 1 – hardship: Supporting nursing and midwifery in times of need

We will provide a safety net for those who are facing financial hardship, as well as providing a pathway towards a sustainable future. We will also develop a new centre that will invest in projects that aim to improve the health and wellbeing of nursing and midwifery staff.

Our work with The King’s Fund on *The Courage of Compassion* has demonstrated the positive impact that compassionate leadership can have on the morale, motivation and retention of nursing and midwifery staff. Our intention during the period of this strategic plan is to build on this work further as a means of addressing retention issues within the professions.

We will:

1. Deliver a high-quality, outcome-focused benevolent service providing grants and signposting support to the most vulnerable members of the nursing and midwifery communities.
2. Develop and enhance our signposting hub, ensuring that even more nurses, midwives and health care/maternity support workers are provided with routes out of poverty and hardship. We will seek to capture the tangible impact of this intervention on the lives of those who receive it.
3. We will establish the Centre for Compassionate Leadership in Nursing and Midwifery. The centre will be a hub for research, projects and initiatives that will aim to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for nursing and midwifery staff, particularly in relation to mental ill health.

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

Patients and residents deserve the best possible care delivered by nursing and midwifery professionals whose skills and experience are underpinned by evidence-based practice. Accessing education and learning activities is therefore vital, and also supports revalidation. In the current climate of budget cuts across all sectors, options for funding such activities will continue to diminish. Funding to develop and enhance learning, and to disseminate best practice, therefore remains a key priority for the Foundation.

Having awarded several hundred education grants since the Foundation was established, we have built an extensive body of alumni with skills, knowledge and expertise. Over the period of this strategy, we will utilise their know-how to enhance our education grants offer, whilst also offering them opportunities for further growth and development.

During the co-creation process, leadership was raised as an area where support was required, despite the plethora of leadership support already offered across the sector. The Foundation's education grants contribute to leadership development within nursing and midwifery, both directly, through the funding of leadership courses, and also indirectly through the funding of postgraduate studies. This will continue to be our approach. Furthermore, our planned activities on compassionate leadership, as set out in Strategic Aim 1, mean that our leadership activities will have a specific focus.

We will:

1. Increase the number of grants for education and learning opportunities by 35% over the period of the plan to nursing and midwifery staff at all levels.
2. Develop targeted partnerships with individuals and organisations to expand the reach and impact of our education and learning grants.
3. Increase the support available to individuals to improve the quality of their applications. This will also include reviewing the barriers to accessing grants for some groups and setting out measures to address these barriers.
4. Develop and expand our alumni programme, aiming to build a virtuous circle of support by alumni to education grant applicants. We will also provide opportunities for our alumni to develop their careers further through a bespoke programme of activity.
5. We will continue to deliver an education grants programme aimed at supporting the career development pathways for health care/maternity support workers.
6. We will continue to deliver a suite of grants that address inequality and discrimination, specifically the Amin Abdullah, Olufunke Adeyeye, and Michelle Cox grants.
7. We will explore the viability of developing a repository to house the outcomes of work that has been funded through the Foundation's education grants as a resource for the wider nursing and midwifery teams.

Strategic Aim 3 – research and innovation: Developing and delivering a research and innovation strategy, that will have at its core the funding of nursing- and midwifery-led projects that improve patient care, health and wellbeing

Research and innovation drive excellence in the delivery of care and clinical practice, improving patient outcomes and experiences, and creating healthier communities. Our new research and innovation strategy will contribute to the expansion of evidence-based practice for the nursing and midwifery professions. We will aim to increase the profile, volume and depth of the Foundation's research and innovation footprint, whilst focussing on the areas where we can make the most impact.

An important element of our activities under this strategic aim will be to develop early career researchers, and to ensure that funding also encompasses quality improvement projects. Ultimately, our intention over the period of the plan is to act as a 'hothouse' for creating the next generation of nursing and midwifery researchers, and to develop a broader research culture within nursing and midwifery.

Whilst support for midwifery has always been a core element of the Foundation's work, we will be explicit within this strategic plan about the support we provide to the professions.

We will:

1. Raise the profile of the RCN Foundation's research offer within nursing and midwifery through a targeted communications plan and collaboration.
2. Continue and complete the research programmes on children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing, and learning disability nursing, sharing learning and facilitating the translation of that learning into practice.
3. Continue and complete the research programme on neuro rehabilitation and care, sharing learning and facilitating the translation of that learning into practice.
4. Establish the first Chair in Adult Social Care Nursing in the UK. We will work closely with them to shape the research agenda for this important area of work.
5. Establish a programme to develop a pathway for early career researchers.
6. Ensure that the Foundation's research offer also includes funding opportunities for quality improvement projects, and that these are available to all parts of the nursing and midwifery workforce.
7. Develop a new grant funding programme on greener practice and sustainability in nursing and midwifery.
8. Develop a new grant funding programme focused on issues of midwifery and maternal health. This programme will target the key issues from both a workforce and clinical practice perspective.

Community

Communities bring people together to advocate for and support each other, and provide a sense of belonging, all of which is important to enabling transformational change.

The communities we support, serve and are part of – including nursing and midwifery staff, patients and care home residents, and the Foundation’s own Trustees, Advisors and staff– are vital to the successful delivery of this strategic plan.

The Foundation is a people-focused organisation. Our beneficiaries, and the impact that they have on their patients and residents, are central to everything that we do. That is why we have taken a co-creation approach to developing this strategic plan.

Whether we are providing a grant for hardship or education, of funding a research team to improve clinical practice, we will work in a way that is driven by our values. Our underpinning ethos will be to add value to the individuals and organisations that we support beyond the immediate funding that we provide. For example, for those in financial hardship, we will aim to provide pathways to a more sustainable future; for those receiving education grants, we will offer development opportunities as a member of the Foundation’s Alumni Network; and for research teams, we will seek to bring attention to the excellence of their work to wider audiences.

As a funder in perpetuity, our intention is to be *relevant for today and ready for tomorrow*. With that in mind, we will steward the Foundation’s assets in a way that supports the needs of the professions today and preserves and grows them for future generations.



We will continue to support and develop our staff to ensure that they work well together for the benefit of our beneficiaries. Following the challenges wrought by the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, we will continue to focus on their mental wellbeing as they carry out their roles to support and strengthen nursing, midwifery and patient care.

We will also ensure that we are properly resourced to deliver this plan, something that will be set out in our new People Strategy.

Connections

Connecting with those who share our values and ethos will be central to the success of this strategic plan.

We will nurture existing partnerships and create new ones with the aim of leveraging greater support for nursing and midwifery than if we were to work alone. We will build on our role as a leading and trusted grant-maker within nursing and midwifery, across all three areas of our work.

Our partnership working will be underpinned by four core principles: transparency, trust and honesty, agreed shared goals and values, and regular communication between partners.

The challenge of alleviating hardship within nursing and midwifery is not a small one. We will therefore continue to work with other charities in our sector in order to leverage better outcomes for those who most need our help. We will also continue to work with Entitledto and PayPlan to ensure that our 'rounded' offer of support – hardship grants, benefits advice and debt advice – reaches our beneficiaries.

We have witnessed the value that connecting with others has brought to our education grants offer. Our work with other grant-makers and companies, such as The Worshipful Company of Needle-makers and LV=, has increased our reach and targeted those in particular need of support. That's why we will be stepping up our efforts to increase partnership working in this area.

Developing high quality, evidence-based practice makes a positive difference to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. However, delivering such practice through partnerships can make a transformational difference. Building strong partnerships will therefore be a key facet of our research and innovation strategy.

Finally, we will also collaborate with health research bodies across the four countries of the UK to ensure that outcomes from our funded projects have a truly national reach.



Enabling, monitoring and delivering the strategic plan

This strategic plan will bring clarity and focus to our work. It will set out our direction of travel over the next five years, and what we need to measure to demonstrate success.

Key Principles

Underpinning the strategic plan will be a number of key principles. These are the tenets that will run through how we operate and all of the work we do.

1. We will have a bedrock of strong governance, which will enable us to move forward with confidence and focus on the right things. Strong governance will enable us to ensure compliance with regulations, promote a culture of accountability, and help us to fulfil our charitable objectives.
2. We will maintain our identity as an independent charity supporting all health and care staff. We will also ensure that we work collegiately and collaboratively within the RCN Group to ensure that we are a strong advocate for nursing and midwifery.
3. We will adhere to principles of equity, diversity and inclusion across all aspects of our organisation and its work. A commitment to fairness, transparency and integrity will drive our approach.
4. We will commit to tackling the causes and impacts of climate change in our role as a charity, a grant-maker and an employer. We will take practical action to achieve net zero by embedding climate change and sustainability across our activities, investments, governance and culture.
5. We will ensure that we are a good steward of our assets so that we remain a financially resilient organisation with a sustainable future. Our approach to our finances will be underpinned by principles of ESG, responsible investment and robust donor relationships.

Measuring our success and sharing the outcomes

We will continue to use our Impact Framework to measure the outcomes from our funded work. We will seek to continuously improve our approach to measuring our impact so that we ensure we achieve the best outcomes for our beneficiaries.

Ensuring that the outcomes of research can be developed into tangible action will be a priority for the Foundation. We will aim to ensure that the research we fund does not simply 'sit on a shelf', but rather is used to improve the provision of care. We will therefore invest resources in developing new ways of sharing the outcomes from our work.

The way in which we do this is likely to evolve over the life of the strategic plan. However, we will remain committed to ensuring that where possible, our research leads to lasting and positive change.

Finally, we will ensure that we take the time to celebrate our successes and any key milestones. During the period of this strategy, the Foundation will celebrate its 15th anniversary – we will use this and other opportunities to highlight how our work has made a positive difference to nursing and midwifery staff and, through them, to those for whom they care.



By 2028, we will have achieved the following...



Increase the number of individuals' lives improved through hardship or education support by 25% to 4,585.



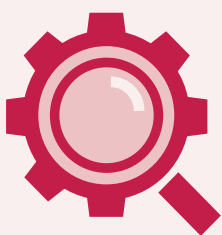
Increase the average value of total partnerships by 370% to £0.25m over the 5-year strategy period.



Increase the average expenditure on direct grant-making by 40% to £0.80m over the 5-year strategy period.



At least 50% of our grant-making activity will be targeted at areas of greatest deprivation and health inequality.



Increase the average expenditure on research and innovation by 75% to £0.4m over the 5-year strategy period.

Our strategy is designed to evolve and develop our work and approach. It cannot remain static against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world which is likely to throw up unforeseen challenges. The success of the strategic plan will be judged on how we respond to these challenges, whilst remaining resolute in delivering the aims and activities set out in this plan.

We want to hear from you.

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

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 @RCNFoundation

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