

Activate

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News, views and support for RCN activists



Funding plans risk future of nursing

RCN members believe proposals in England to scrap bursaries and make nursing students pay tuition fees will lead to even greater staff shortages in the NHS

More than two-thirds of respondents to an RCN survey said they would not have studied nursing if they'd had to take out a student loan and pay fees.

The RCN had a huge response to its survey, with the majority of respondents being registered nurses who overwhelmingly oppose the Government's plans. Eight in 10 said they thought the changes will have a negative impact on patient care and more than 90 per cent thought the changes will lead to decreased numbers of applications from mature students with dependants. The Government's proposals do not have the backing of nurse educators either; 80 per cent disagreed with the plans.

The Government hopes their new plans will allow for a big increase in the number of student nurse training places, but has not allocated any funding for the extra clinical placements and mentors. RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Janet Davies said this represented a huge gamble with the future of the nursing workforce. "Every extra training place needs a number of high quality clinical placements to give the student practical experience. The Government has not explained how these extra placements will be funded, and nurses are clearly saying that without extra funding the quality of mentoring will suffer.

"The Government must listen to these concerns and work with the RCN and others to identify a fair, effective and sustainable funding system for nursing education," Janet added.

Earlier this month RCN members protested against the plans at a march in London. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/studentbursaries

MRS update

The Member Representation and Support (MRS) Programme Board has agreed to review stewards' equipment and how they use it to help plan for future needs and budgeting.

At their meeting in April, Board members decided to revise the RCN's business continuity plan to include stewards who are managing cases.

They also discussed plans to audit the support and supervision reps get and evaluate the content on the online reps' hub at www.rcn.org.uk/reps

i The MRS programme is under the direction of a board, which meets quarterly. The board is now chaired by Chris Cox, in his new role as Director of Membership Relations. The programme aims to improve the RCN's approach to capturing and sharing information between departments to enhance members' experiences of using RCN services.

Safety reps set to tackle NHS sharps problem



A new report has identified significant health and safety concerns relating to the use of sharps in the NHS. Safety representatives are encouraged to make employers aware of the findings and work in partnership with them to ensure compliance with regulations.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) report identified health and safety breaches in 90 per cent of the organisations it visited. Four-fifths failed to comply with sharps regulations, and improvement notices were issued to nearly half

of them. The RCN, working in partnership with other NHS trade unions, pressed the HSE to undertake the inspection.

"These results are very worrying," said Lesley Pallett, from the RCN UK Safety Representatives Committee. "This is a key campaigning issue for us and it is essential we now work with employers to resolve these issues."

Read *Prevention and Management of Sharps Injuries: Inspection of NHS Organisations – Report of an Inspection Initiative 2015/16* on the HSE website. Read RCN guidance on sharps safety at <http://tiny.cc/sharpsafety>

Memorial lecture to explore risk, resilience and leadership

Leo Houlding, a world-class climber, alpinist and adventurer, will present this year's John Goodlad memorial lecture at RCN Congress. "This lecture will be of particular relevance to anyone with an interest in risk management, leadership and resilience," said Denise McLaughlin, Chair of the RCN UK Safety Representatives Committee. John Goodlad worked for the RCN as a labour relations officer from 1977 until his death in November 1991. This annual lecture, organised by the RCN UK Safety Representatives Committee, was established as a tribute to him.

NMC changes stance on police cautions

It will now be considered fraudulent if nurses and midwives fail to declare a police caution or conviction when they renew their registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).



It used to be treated as misconduct, but the NMC says it will now be dealt with as a fraudulent entry on the register because the renewal will have been made without all the information available to them. This enables the NMC to use a slightly different fitness to practise procedure, making it easier for them to remove the registrant.

"We've always advised members to declare cautions and convictions immediately, but this is a further reason for speedy action if a member finds themselves in this situation," said Roz Hooper, RCN Principal Legal Officer.

Case study

An off-duty nurse threw a cup of lemonade at her husband after a row. The cup bounced off the wall, hit and damaged the computer. The police were called. When they asked the husband whose computer it was, he said it was a present to him from his brother. The nurse, who had no representation, was cautioned for criminal damage.

"This is a good example of how trivial cautions can be. An employer would simply see 'criminal damage' on someone's DBS certificate. It is essential for members to have legal representation at police interviews," stressed Roz. Representatives should advise members they can self-refer to the RCN's legal department. <https://www.rcn.org.uk/membership/legal-help>

Tributes paid to 'passionate and active' member

Dominic Walsh, a longstanding RCN activist and member of the Agenda Committee, died on 12 May. Dominic had been actively involved with the RCN since 2003, as an RCN steward, in his branches, in the RCN Critical Care Forum, and on a number of RCN committees.

Dominic will be greatly missed by all his RCN colleagues. He played a full and passionate part in planning the Congress agendas for the past five years. He was an active member, a dedicated campaigner for equality, and someone who always put other members first.

Huge loss

Hundreds of messages of condolence were posted on the RCN Facebook page, with former RCN Council member Anne Wells summing up the feelings of many. "Dominic was a person who lit up the room by just walking in to it," she said.

Nothing was too much trouble for Dominic, according to Rod Thomson, RCN Deputy President. "He could always be relied on during Congress to help our members, me or the other members of the Agenda Committee. I was looking forward to catching up with him in



Glasgow. He will be a huge loss to his family and many friends, as well as the RCN."

Fellow activist Sarah Waters described Dominic as "witty, giving, passionate about nursing and supportive of colleagues." She added: "I will always picture him with his trademark moustache and big grin. His loss is to all who had the pleasure to meet and know him, to the College and to nursing."

Helping you communicate with members

In response to member feedback, Chair of RCN Council Michael Brown pledged to look into ways activists could make contact with members in their branch, forum or place of

work to inform them about RCN activity. A project was launched to create new channels of communication that would help reps do this more easily.



There has been considerable progress. New Facebook groups have been piloted and a digital Member Communications Centre (MCC) has been developed. This will enable activists to log on, search for members they might want to contact and communicate with them in a variety of ways.

Use of the MCC will be rolled out in phases, with branch and forum officials being trained first. After the first phase of the rollout, the system will be refined and improved and additional groups of members will be offered training.

More details will be shared at this year's AGM.

EU debate

Membership of the European Union (EU) will be hotly debated at the start of RCN Congress as members discuss the benefits for nursing of EU membership. The RCN is encouraging members to vote. Listen to RCN podcasts outlining the cases for and against at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/about-us/international/eu-referendum>. Download *The Impact of the European Union on Nursing in the UK – a Factual Guide* at <http://tinyurl.com/hy6r57u>

AGM reminder

Activists are encouraged to attend and vote at this year's RCN annual general meeting (AGM). If you're not able to attend you can watch the webcast live, submit questions to governance.support@rcn.org.uk and vote by proxy at www.ersvotes.com/rcnagm16 before 2.15pm on Tuesday 14 June. The AGM agenda is available at www.rcn.org.uk/agm2016. Proxy votes will be counted if a poll is called. This year's meeting will be held at 2.15pm on Tuesday 21 June at the SECC in Glasgow.

NHS Professionals

Members who book bank shifts through NHS Professionals may have difficulty doing this using their online system if they have been selected for NMC verification. Members need to send their verification email from the NMC to servicedesk@nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk. They will receive an automated email containing a six digit number and should advise NHS Professionals of this by calling 0333 2407 552, (choosing the option for 'flexible worker').

Proud to welcome you to Glasgow



Activists are at the heart of the RCN's flagship event, says Chair of Congress Stuart McKenzie

I couldn't be more happy and proud to welcome you to my home city of Glasgow for this year's RCN Congress. People make Glasgow and year after year activists make Congress.

The work we do together will influence and drive the College forward for many years to come. By getting involved, speaking up and asking the important questions, you make sure Congress is lively, exciting and relevant.

Becoming Chair of RCN Congress was the greatest ambition of my nursing career and I can't wait to work with you again.

However, this year's event will be tinged with sadness as we reflect on the loss of a great friend and colleague to many of us. Agenda Committee member Dominic Walsh, who died last month, will be with us in spirit in Glasgow, but I, like many others, will miss his humour, smile and reflections so much.

He was the conscience of the Agenda Committee and was able to challenge in a constructive and considered way that is rare in large organisations like the RCN. To me he was the epitome of a great activist. Let's make this Congress the best ever, in memory of this unique, respected and lovely man.

Visit www.rcn.org.uk/congress

"I can't wait to work with you again"

Submit emergency agenda items up until Wednesday 22 June. Find out more at www.rcn.org.uk/congress

ASK AN ADVISER



Revalidation



How can agency nurses and midwives find a revalidation confirmer?

Although finding a confirmer might seem daunting for agency staff, it needn't be. The obvious choice would be the nurse or midwife's line manager (who does not need to be an NMC registrant). Where this isn't possible, the confirmer can be another NMC registrant. This person should ideally have worked with the nurse or midwife or have a similar scope of practice to them, but this is not essential.

If there is no line manager or NMC registrant to provide confirmation, it can come from another health care professional registered in the UK. This might be a pharmacist, doctor or dentist who works with the member. If the confirmer is not an NMC registrant, the reflective discussion must happen with someone who is on the NMC register.

For agency nurses and midwives who feel isolated and unable to identify an appropriate confirmer, connections can be made through professional networks such as RCN forums (www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/forums). Read more on confirmation at <http://tiny.cc/vshwby>

You can speak in confidence to an RCN Direct adviser any time between 8.30am and 8.30pm, 365 days per year.

RCN DIRECT
www.rcn.org.uk/direct
0345 772 6100

View from the frontline



We can make a difference

I've gained so much from becoming active with the RCN. I was recently elected to the students committee and am one of just two student nurses involved in the NMC consultation on graduate registered nurse education. It's a once in a generation opportunity and I have a chance to make a real difference.

The RCN is respected as a union and a professional body – and being active is a great way to get even more out of your career. The opportunities I've had have helped me build national networks and contacts already.

I hope this is just the start of my work with the College. I want to stand up and be counted. That's why I went to Westminster to lobby MPs on changes to student nurse funding in England. I am determined that we will not be ignored. Nursing students should be listened to – we are the future of nursing. I'm speaking at Congress this month on why students should get more involved in the RCN – it would be great to see other activists there.

When I speak to other members I tell them that it's easy to say you can't do anything about something you're unhappy about, but I make it my business to try to make sure nurses are in the room when decisions are being made. This is how we can make a difference. Get in on conversations. Don't just sit on your laurels, don't just complain – do something about it and never give up.

Francesca Elner (pictured second left)
RCN Students Committee

LEGAL UPDATE



The Trade Union Act



As it was reported in *Activate* last month, the Trade Union Bill has now received Royal Assent.

There's no starting date for the 2016 act yet and there may still be challenges from the Scottish and Welsh governments, given their earlier opposition to the Bill. Although it goes against the Government's

wishes, there will now be a consultation on electronic voting, which has been welcomed by unions.

Not all of the original bill has survived. For example, the Government proposed allowing the use of agency workers during strikes, but this was dropped.

Important changes

The main changes are:

- An industrial action ballot must have a turnout of 50 per cent of those entitled to vote, as well as a simple majority of those voting in favour.
- In health at least 40 per cent of those eligible to vote in a ballot must be in favour.
- The ballot paper must contain more detail than at present.
- Industrial action ballots will remain valid for six months (nine months with the employer's agreement).
- Fourteen days' notice must generally be given of any strike action.
- Unions must appoint suitable picket supervisors.
- The certification officer is given new powers to investigate and take enforcement action where a union breaches statutory duties.
- A minister can make regulations requiring public sector employers to publish information about facilities time and, three years later, may exercise reserve powers to restrict such time in certain circumstances.

Arguably the Act's provisions remain in violation of various international treaties, to which the UK is a party, including ILO Conventions 87, 98 and 151, and the European Social Charter.

Chris Cox
RCN Director of Membership Relations

‘There's a lot for us to learn’

RCN Head of Employment Relations Josie Irwin reflects on recent industrial action by junior doctors

After a further 10 days of intensive talks last month, and subject to approval by British Medical Association (BMA) members, an agreement has finally been reached on the new contract for junior doctors – and there will be no further strike action while the referendum on the proposed new terms is underway.

The fact that a resolution is close is, of course, good news. But the junior doctors’ dispute shows what happens when loyal, hard-working and over-burdened staff are pushed to the limit.

There’s a lot to learn – for us, in relation to any further attacks on terms and conditions for nursing staff in the NHS, including unsocial hours, but also for the Government in terms of how it conducts negotiations.

It’s about mutual respect

They ignored almost every basic principle of effective negotiation. Unilaterally, the Government set a deadline for reaching agreement. Then they threatened to impose a solution if no agreement was forthcoming.

Negotiations of this sort require a degree of mutual respect between the main parties. But the Health Secretary accused the junior doctors’ leaders of “misrepresenting” the Government’s offer and, when emergency cover was withdrawn, of promoting “extreme action” that would “harm vulnerable patients”.

There were contradictory messages, too. He said the new contract was definitely “not a cost-cutting exercise”. But he also said that trusts must begin reducing their deficits in an attempt to resolve the financial crisis in the NHS. So rather than helping to deliver seven-day services, as he had argued, it’s clear the proposed contract was simply a cover for cutting the salary bill.

All of these mistakes served simply to antagonise the doctors, and resulted in escalating industrial action and a damaging strike. A ballot of junior doctors



last November showed an astonishing 98 per cent in favour of strike action on a very high turnout of 76 per cent. That’s particularly significant given the attacks on balloting rules in the Government’s recently enacted trade union legislation. And public support for the junior doctors remained high, even after the all-out strikes at the end of April.

No illusions

Even though agreement has been reached, subject of course to the referendum of BMA junior doctors, we need to be prepared for the aftermath.

We are absolutely clear that it is complete nonsense in a recruitment crisis to propose paying those staff who are already working across seven days any less for the work they do on Saturdays. To do so would be morally wrong and economically short-sighted.

We think the public will be on our side.

Read the RCN briefing on the circumstances in which RCN Council may authorise industrial action on behalf of members. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-004113



The creation of something special



Daniel Allen looks back at the history of RCN Congress and how it has evolved over the years

The 2002 obituary of Baroness Beatrice Serota in *The Guardian* recorded her achievements as a health minister and social reformer but not her small place in RCN history. In October 1969, the baroness opened the first RCN Annual Congress and Exhibition, held in Harrogate.

A Voice for Nurses: A History of the Royal College of Nursing 1916-90 notes that for many years before 1969, the Annual Meeting had been a fixture of the RCN calendar. Hosted by a different branch each year, the event began with a religious service and offered excursions to local hospitals and places of interest. There was a civic reception and a conference, and the College and various sections within it held their AGMs.

By the 1960s, the RCN wanted to project a livelier image and in 1967 the RCN Representative Body (RRB) was opened to all members. A wider range of national and local entities could now submit topics for debate and delegates had a free vote. Subjects discussed at that first RRB meeting included the structure of the NHS and standards of care – rarely off the agenda since.

“Congress has made me a better nurse”

Two years later, the first RCN Congress offered a mix of professional events, social activities, debate, a formal dinner and the three-day RRB, all underwritten by the newly introduced exhibition. Photographs from the time showing a Congress top table lined by ladies in hats are a reminder that the huge, diverse, impassioned, headline-grabbing event of today is perhaps only distantly related.

A vision for the future

Developing Congress into its modern form would require the vision of many people including a succession of general secretaries, not least Trevor Clay. *A Voice for Nurses* describes how in 1987 Trevor attended the convention of the American National League of Nursing “and was impressed by the professional presentation of the event”. In future, the book notes, the Congress auditorium “would mirror this stylish appearance, moving away from the traditional trade union congress model to a modern image of a powerful political party”.

But even if the hats and gentility of early congresses are long gone, what binds then with now is the event’s overall purpose. As well as a forum to debate, Congress has always been an opportunity to unite in a common cause; a coming-together that serves to inspire.

Over the years, there have been countless memorable Congress moments – poignant, political, angry, joyous, shared. The reputations of future nursing stars have been forged – and in the case of some politicians, undone. Congress has shaken and stirred governments, leading directly to change. It has, on many occasions, also challenged the College.

But perhaps its greatest benefit is as a transformative experience. Congress this year will be ward sister Laura Falconer’s seventh. On the Congress website, she explains why she comes back. “Above all,” she says, “Congress has made me a better nurse.”

Congress 2016

Keep up with all the news from Glasgow at www.rcn.org.uk/congress

NOTICEBOARD

Tackling discrimination



RCN representatives are now even better prepared to recognise and challenge discrimination, following further improvements to their training.

All representatives completing the learning and development pathway will find out what is meant by equality, diversity and fair treatment in the workplace. They will also practise implementing this knowledge so they can support members when they require representation. The changes mean RCN representatives will have an awareness of the key legislation and the legal risks associated with equality and diversity when representing members.

RCN learning representative Dionne Daniel said she feels excited and enthusiastic about tackling workplace discrimination. "I was very pleased with the quality of the training," she said. "I particularly liked the work on stereotypes based on how people looked. I intend taking this new knowledge back to my workplace." As part of the latest curriculum review of the pathway the RCN has provided updated learning materials for reps. An equality impact assessment of the pathway will also be carried out to identify what else the RCN can do to support learners who believe they may be disadvantaged in any way.

Tools of the Trade



The Labour Research Department has published guidance explaining how to represent members in social media disciplinary hearings. Read *Social Media at Work – A Guide for Trade Union Reps* at www.lrdpublications.org.uk/publications.php?pub=BK

Information on the national minimum wage and the national living wage is now available from Acas. Visit www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1902

Acas has also published new guidance on sex discrimination. Download *Sex Discrimination:*

Key Points for the Workplace from www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1814

The TUC has updated its information for representatives on the law and its limitations in relation to sickness absence and disability discrimination. For more information visit <http://tiny.cc/disabilitydiscrim>

A series of resources has been designed by the NHS Employers working longer group to raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges relating to an ageing workforce. For more information visit <http://tiny.cc/workinglonger>

Elections for Congress Chair and Vice Chair

Nominations for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair of Congress will open on 18 June. It's a chance to lead the RCN's annual nursing event and play a key part in shaping the future direction of the College.

Both roles will have a two-year term commencing on 1 September 2016. You must submit your nomination by 4.30pm on Monday 11 July. It should be endorsed by two officers from an RCN branch, forum or one of the RCN's UK committees.

Once all nominations have been received, voting will take place to choose the successful applicant.

For more information on these roles and all upcoming elections, including those for the president and deputy president, visit www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/rcn-elections-and-appointments

Information on running a successful election campaign is available at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/rcn-elections-and-appointments/run-a-successful-rcn-election-campaign>

RCN Foundation fundraising in centenary year

In the RCN's centenary year, College staff are carrying a replica Florence Nightingale lamp 1,500 miles around the UK to raise money for the RCN Foundation. So far walkers have raised more than £2,500.

If you would like to join in, contact your local office for more information and details of local stages. The RCN is welcoming members to take part at all the stages throughout the UK but particularly in some of the northern England stages.

The RCNWalk100 started in Exeter in April and will visit all RCN offices, finishing in Belfast in October. Search Twitter for [#RCNWalk100](https://twitter.com/RCNWalk100) to see photos of the walk so far.

