



RCN
ACTIVATE

PRIORITISING PERSONAL SAFETY	P11
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FOR RCN ACTIVE MEMBERS ACROSS THE UK

SUMMER 2021



**FIVE MINUTES
WITH DENISE**

**OUR NEW RCN PRESIDENT SHARES WHAT SHE HOPES TO
ACHIEVE AND WHY NURSING WILL ALWAYS BE HER PASSION**

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This issue of *Activate* is perhaps one of the best yet. Once you've read all the pieces here on the astounding work of RCN members and our professional union, I expect you'll feel the same pride and excitement that I did.

This editorial is more difficult to write than usual. July is set to be action-packed in your campaign for fair pay. There is even a risk that things have moved quickly while this magazine was in the post! Page 5 gives you the most up-to-date information on NHS pay negotiations as we sent *Activate* to the printers. But the RCN's website, social media channels, staff or reps where you work will always have the very latest.

There has been a concerted effort on our campaign for fair pay and there's a lot

more to come. Members in Scotland have sent a letter of dispute after the Scottish government failed to listen to our rejection of the NHS pay offer. In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, our campaign has gathered pace and we are well prepared for the inevitable showdown with other governments over pay. I want to give you my personal commitment that we are led by members and our collective best interests. That doesn't just apply to those working in the NHS. We're balloting members working for Marie Curie on their pay too. This is a really fundamental issue for me – members must be given a say on their pay deals.

If you have an Agenda for Change contract in England, Northern Ireland or Wales then look out for what your ministers announce and when the RCN ballot arrives to consult you on the offer then please vote. You can only have your say if we know your current email address and place of work. Please update your information via the link at the top of this page.

This magazine is a testament to what we can achieve for ourselves and this College – and, by the time of the next issue, I hope there is plenty more positive news about your campaign for fair pay.

Graham Revie

Chair of the RCN Trade Union Committee

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Don't forget, this is your magazine. If you've got a story to share, tell us by sending an email to activate@rcn.org.uk

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4 UPDATE

Healthy workplaces



We've recently updated our Healthy Workplace toolkit to provide organisations with a framework to improve working environments.

The resources, which include posters for your workplace and pandemic-specific advice, highlight the need for nursing staff to take their at-work breaks and remain hydrated during their shift.

Visit rcn.org.uk/healthy-workplace or turn to page 12 for your pull-out Rest, Rehydrate, Refuel poster.

Elections and appointments open for committee roles

Thirty-one of the RCN's forums are appointing steering committee members this summer, with applications open from 5 July to 9 August.

Steering committees represent forum members and provide an expert voice for the specialty. Turn to page 22 to read how they help plan and deliver events for members across the UK as well.

Members can also put themselves forward for election to the RCN's professional nursing and trade union committees. Nominations are open from 19 July to 3 September.

On the Professional Nursing Committee – the College's decision-making body for

professional issues – seats up for election include Scotland, South East, South West, Wales, West Midlands, Yorkshire & the Humber, and the nursing support worker and student seats.

On the Trade Union Committee, which makes decisions on the RCN's trade union functions and activities, seats up for election include Eastern, East Midlands, London, Northern, Northern Ireland, North West, and the nursing support worker and student seats.

Applications for five vacancies on the RCN International Committee will also be open from 23 August to 1 October, with interviews taking place in November. Visit

rcn.org.uk/current-elections

Register to attend RCN Congress 2021 now

Registration for RCN Congress – taking place from 18 to 20 September – is now open.

The agenda has been published with compassion fatigue, 12-hour shifts and support for overseas nurses among the topics members are set to discuss.

You can register online at rcn.org.uk/congress or contact us directly, either on

029 2054 6460 or by sending an email to congress.bookings@rcn.org.uk

Voting members from branches, forums and relevant committees should also register to attend. At this stage, voting members don't need to tell us whether they're attending in person or online.

Turn to page 20 to find out more.

Our fight for fair pay in Scotland intensifies

We've lodged a trade dispute with the Scottish government after it decided to implement an NHS pay deal our members rejected.

The single-year deal for Agenda for Change staff in Scotland falls far short of our calls for a 12.5% pay increase that applies equally to all bands.

"We've been left with no choice but to notify the Scottish government of this dispute," said RCN Scotland Board Chair Julie Lamberth. "They have relied on the good will of nursing staff for too long. Every patient needs and deserves the best quality of care possible, but nursing staff are exhausted and worrying numbers are considering leaving the profession.

"This is a formal expression of our members' frustration and concern for patient safety. We've sent a clear message that the time to value nursing as a safety critical profession is now."

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care in Scotland has agreed to meet to discuss our concerns. Members will be kept informed and decide what happens next.

The lodging of a trade dispute does not commit the RCN to any future action.



**FAIR PAY
FOR NURSING**

What's happening elsewhere in the UK?

As *Activate* went to press, we were awaiting the NHS Pay Review Body's recommendation on a pay increase for Agenda for Change staff in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Ministers will decide what the pay award will be and this will not be put to a vote of NHS staff. However, we'll be consulting members on whether they feel the award is adequate and what further action they wish to take.

What can you do?

Activists in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will soon receive Fair Pay For Nursing business cards in the post. These

include a QR code for MyRCN to encourage members to update their details, which will be crucial when we consult members on the imminent NHS pay award.

Please use the cards to start conversations with colleagues and look out for our "events in a box" becoming available to order. These will contain all you need to host a Fair Pay For Nursing event, including a presentation, business cards, flyers, posters as well as a leaflet explaining how pay is determined and the role that members will play in next steps.

Find out more and order your event box at rcn.org.uk/pay/latest-updates

RCN Council is determined that the College is able to conduct industrial action as a last resort, should it be necessary and supported by members. As *Activate* went to press, we were about to publish the RCN Industrial Action Handbook. Visit our website to download your copy now.

6 PEOPLE

Five minutes with our new RCN President

Dr Denise Chaffer explains what she hopes to achieve in the role and why nursing will always be her passion



Denise

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bulletin](https://rcn.org.uk/bulletin)

“People sometimes think kindness is a soft word but actually it’s one of the most important things for nursing staff.

“We have to be kind, and highly skilled, not either or. We have to be able to be both to deliver the excellent care our patients deserve. This also means being kind to each other,” says Denise, as she begins to articulate what nursing means to her and the reasons behind wanting to become RCN President.

Person-centred care

Describing the importance of nursing, Denise says: “You enter someone’s life in a moment when you can make such a difference. In nursing, so often the small things are the big things to patients. The way you make someone feel is so crucial – people will always remember that.”

“For me, the most important thing – irrespective of clinical specialty, setting or progress in our nursing career – is that the person is

always at the centre of what we do. To give the best care we need a valued, supported profession, in which people support each other. Safe staffing levels are critical for this and without urgent action to address the severe shortage of nurses, the safe care of our patients is at major risk.”

But why the role of RCN President, and why now?

“It’s been a difficult time for all of us over the last 18 months but the way the value

of all aspects of nursing has shone through has been truly inspiring. Nursing has responded to the pandemic and come to the fore in a lot of positive ways, and I can see opportunities to build on that and take the profession forward,” says Denise. “As RCN President, I want to make sure I give a voice to all areas of nursing – and to unite them. It’s also important to me to help the profession become more confident.”

Presidential priorities

In terms of her priorities, Denise says: “We have seen a heightening interest in nursing, but we must retain the nursing staff we have and further develop the evidence on what we need to do to keep them nursing.”

Denise plans to work with members to promote the value of nursing, patient safety and the delivery of high-quality care, while recognising the contribution from all areas of nursing to patient care – including the independent, voluntary and charitable sectors. “We need a greater focus on valuing nursing, ensuring an emphasis on inclusion, equality and diversity, support, fair disciplinary and promotion processes for all, reduction in abuse and assaults, as well as safe staffing and fair pay,” Denise adds.

Denise is passionate about fairness and improving leadership in nursing. She’s especially interested in the benefits of a distributed leadership model. “It’s where you create the environment for everyone to be a leader,” she explains. “Where there is a place for all to be successful and to be

able to speak up for things that are key to them being able to do their jobs better.

“I feel so overwhelmed and extremely humbled to have been elected. And it means I have now been given the opportunity to help create the environment for others to be leaders and to thrive and follow – if I can do this, anyone can. It’s important I honour the confidence people have in me to do this but my success going forward will depend on the support of others.”

Currently Director of Safety and Learning at NHS Resolution, nurse and midwife Denise has previously held a number of director of nursing roles, including for two acute trusts, a primary care commissioning organisation and for the North West London area team for NHS England.

The future of nursing

The RCN has always been a significant part of Denise’s professional life, having only missed one RCN Congress since 1988. She is particularly enthusiastic about her time as an RCN national education adviser. “We have some amazing students and as the future of the profession their voice is vital,” she says.

Finally, what’s the most important thing nursing has taught her? “Always do what you can to see the world fully through the eyes of others. Step into their shoes,” she says. “There is always a story behind a story. Look for it.”

“

The small things are the big things to patients. The way you make someone feel is so crucial

🕒 Denise’s term of office began on 1 July, and she will serve as RCN President until 31 December 2022. Interview by Sophie Goode. Picture by Rob Anderman

8 OPINION

‘Stronger, bolder, braver’

Carol Webley-Brown says our first organising course helped give her the skills to challenge workplace issues and make positive change happen

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected black people and I've had a hard time during the pandemic. I've lost family members and I've had to leave two jobs over the last year due to unfair, discriminatory treatment.

Both times, I felt really let down by the support I received so I decided if I want to see change, I need to get involved. When I saw the Organizing for Power course, I knew it was an opportunity to learn new skills to help me bring about change.

Hope and action

I was encouraged to see that many people looked like me on the course. With the Black Lives Matter movement and everything that's happened over the last year, we know we have to do something. The course has given me hope and it's given me the means to take action.

I've experienced racism at work, but often you can't prove it; it can be covert, microaggressions or there's no one to witness it. We need to be given the

tools to protect ourselves and the ability to make change happen.

In the course's weekly sessions, speakers shared their experiences, and gave us examples of organising. We then went into our online breakout rooms to practise. I found that people felt able to speak up, and be clear, concise and forceful in their message.

Now I'm thinking about other ways the RCN can create opportunities for members to lead and how we can support people to share their stories.

We need to break down and dismantle racism, not just in the NHS but across health care. I'm equally as passionate about raising nursing issues. We're not going to accept the government's proposed 1% NHS pay rise – how dare they?

After I was treated badly in the workplace, I became more introverted, timid and worn down. This training can make you feel stronger, bolder, and braver. It helped me realise that I can make the changes that I want to see happen.



Carol

Get involved

Organising is an approach to making positive change happen, where you identify the issues, work together, and bring about solutions on your own terms. The course Carol attended was the first opportunity to get involved. If you want to see change and to improve nursing and quality of care, sign up to attend our next set of training sessions now at rcn.org.uk/organising

Picture of Carol by Kate Stanworth, courtesy of The Queen's Nursing Institute

‘A better way of working’

Jonathan Bowker from the RCN’s case management team explains how our new email accounts and case management system will support reps

All RCN learning reps, safety reps and stewards have now been issued with an RCN email account and you should have received an email explaining the easy steps you need to take to set yours up.

Using an RCN email account brings lots of benefits and will hopefully make your life easier. These accounts can be accessed from a mobile phone and allow you to communicate with members, fellow reps and staff in a secure and flexible way. You’ll have access to a calendar function too, allowing easier access to Microsoft Teams meetings.

You’ll also need your email account to access our new case management system (CMS).

Our new system will be up and running by the end of the year, with further developments coming in early 2022. It’s being built in-house by our development team with input from the RCN UK reps committees so it can deliver the changes reps have told us they want to see.

Overall, it will be easier to use, more intuitive, and will offer a lot more in terms of functionality.

What will change?

The new system will replace the current CMS used by stewards and, crucially, it will be available to learning reps and safety reps too, offering a more joined-up, better way of working for reps, members and staff.

On the current system, stewards can only record cases. By early 2022, the new system will let all reps, including learning reps and safety reps, record activity outside of casework too, such as raising issues with an employer. You’ll be able to record any important

decisions in the system and keep others informed of what’s happening in your workplace.

All rep supervision will be recorded online within the system too.

The new system offers more flexibility; you’ll be able to access our new CMS securely on your mobile phone using your RCN email address, without the need for multiple logins.

You can read more about the benefits our new CMS will bring and watch a short video demonstration at rcn.org.uk/cms-benefits-reps

Look out for information about CMS training sessions later this year.

Set up your new RCN email address now

All RCN reps should set up their new email account as soon as possible. You’ll have been sent an email with instructions and you can also find the guidance on the RCN Reps Hub at rcn.org.uk/reps-hub

If you need help setting up your account, you can contact our IT team on **029 2054 6400** between 8am-5pm, Monday to Friday.



‘Sleep in’ shifts and pay

A ruling that care workers are only entitled to the national minimum wage for the hours they’re awake and working during overnight shifts is disappointing for members, says Joanne Galbraith-Marten

In the combined appeals of *Royal Mencap Society vs Tomlinson-Blake*, and *Shannon vs Rampersad*, the Supreme Court had to determine whether workers who remain at home as part of their shift and residential care workers who “sleep in” are entitled to the national minimum wage for time that is not spent performing work activities.

Mrs Tomlinson-Blake is a care support worker and was employed by Mencap between 2004 and 2017. She worked as part of a team providing 24-hour care for two vulnerable adults in their home. As part of her duties, Mrs Tomlinson-Blake worked a “sleep in” shift at the service users’ home. During these shifts she was permitted to sleep, but she had to listen out and be on-hand if the service users required assistance or there was an emergency.

In the 16-month period prior to her Employment Tribunal hearing, her sleep was disturbed six times. She received an allowance of £29.50 per “sleep in” shift.

Her case argued that the total number of hours during her “sleep in” shifts should be used to calculate her national minimum wage entitlement. She was successful before the Employment Tribunal and Employment Appeal Tribunal but not in the Court of Appeal.

Mr Shannon was an on-call night care assistant at a residential care home, and he received free accommodation plus a payment of £50 per week, which rose to £90. He was required to be there during the hours of 10pm to 7am but he was permitted to sleep.

Mr Shannon asserted that he should have been paid for all the hours he was on call at night. He was in fact rarely called upon during those hours. Mr Shannon was unsuccessful before the Employment Tribunal, Employment Appeal Tribunal and the Court of Appeal.

The decision

The Supreme Court upheld the Court of Appeal’s decision and found that workers are only entitled to the national minimum wage for the hours



they are awake and working in these scenarios.

The National Minimum Wage is crucial for those in low paid and unstable employment and particularly for some members working in the independent health and social care sector and therefore, this is a hugely disappointing decision.

Joanne Galbraith-Marten is the RCN’s Head of Legal (Employment)

More information

For updated guidance on the calculation of the national minimum wage, visit: tinyurl.com/calculating-min-wage



Prioritising personal safety

Employers have a legal duty to protect the health and safety of employees, including lone workers and those working in the community

What should employers do to protect nursing staff?

Any risks to workers must be included in organisational risk assessments. Measures can then be put in place to reduce the risk. These should include:

- training in personal safety, escalation, carrying out a dynamic risk assessment, relevant organisational policies and procedures, management of violence and aggression and guidance on unacceptable behaviours
- means of raising the alarm, for example, effective lone working equipment
- procedures for the supervision of lone working staff
- an organisation-wide policy and process on unacceptable behaviours and situations, and the withdrawal of care from patients who are violent and abusive.

Employers are also required to review risk assessments following any incidents or changes in work activity and/or the introduction of

new procedures or equipment. RCN safety reps should be consulted on any measures to reduce the risk to lone workers.

What should employers do when staff report feeling unsafe or have been abused or assaulted?

The person's manager should immediately investigate the incident, review risk assessments, and take necessary additional steps to protect nursing staff. Staff shouldn't be asked to enter a potentially unsafe situation until all risk assessments and controls are in place.

The RCN expects employers to have a policy on the management of violence and aggression. This should include actions to tackle unacceptable behaviours or unsafe environments.

If a physical assault results in more than seven days off work, or in the member being unable to carry out normal duties, the incident should be reported to the Health and Safety Executive or the Health and Safety Executive

Northern Ireland under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR). Employers should also provide psychological support and, where necessary, support members in reporting the incident to the police.

How can members escalate concerns?

Members should document all their concerns and follow their organisation's incident reporting and raising concerns procedures in the first instance. If members are unhappy with the action their employer has taken, they can use our model letter to highlight their concerns and should speak to their local RCN safety rep or contact the RCN advice team on **0345 772 6100** for support.

More information

Find our model letter and full advice guide, with information for members and example scenarios, at rcn.org.uk/personal-safety

Give us a break!

Healthy workplace: safe patients



Rest

Breaks are not a luxury but an important means of preventing fatigue-related incidents. A missed break is a patient safety issue.

Ensure nursing staff are able to take their rest breaks.

Dehydration leads to reduced cognition, which can impact on decision making.

Dehydration in nursing staff is a patient

Rehydrate



Refuel

safety issue. Help nursing staff to stay hydrated during a shift.

Eating a balanced diet is important for the nursing workforce, especially for those who work shifts. Ensure nursing staff have easy access to healthy eating options at work.



For further information and evidence on the benefits of a healthy workplace, visit rcn.org.uk/healthy-workplace

14 WORKING TOGETHER

‘Collaboration is key’

From collaborating on cases to annual Eid celebrations, Donna and Hamira are combining their rep roles to combat inequality



Donna



Hamira

Donna Wright, RCN steward and secretary for the Oxfordshire branch, and Hamira Ghafoor, a learning rep and branch chair, have joined forces to find better ways to educate and represent members in their region.

Rep roles

It all started after a trip to RCN Congress, with colleagues Donna and Hamira looking at how they could take a more collaborative approach to their rep roles. “We cobbled together ideas of what

our roles could look like,” says Donna. “Learning rep roles tend to focus on supporting members in learning. As stewards, we often have specific goals for our members to achieve.

“Hamira is more focused on a broader scope of learning. Learning that’s for everybody, not just members, and that’s how positive change is made across the trust.”

Hamira classes Donna as an “amazing ally” for black, Asian

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Words by Becky
Gilroy. Pictures
by Rob Anderman

and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, and they both inform the other's approach to working with members.

Hamira says: "I wanted to turn the learning rep role on its head. I didn't want to just benefit one member at a time, I wanted the organisation to learn."

Instead of learning in silo, Hamira encourages staff to share their stories across the trust. "Stories are very powerful," she says. "When you just look at data and numbers you don't really have that same connection."

Empowering members

Hamira helps members in their individual learning, but she also brings this knowledge to bolster Donna's case work, especially for BAME members.

"Hamira helps members create powerful and effective statements," says Donna. "Together, we can get the best out of members in order to get the best result possible."

Hamira adds: "That's the power we can give back to the members, to give them their voice back. I know what it's like to lose your voice when you go through these experiences, and it took my rep role for me to find my voice again. You go from feeling quite powerless to

a situation where you feel empowered by others.

"During a case, it can be challenging to help navigate a member through something that can feel alien to them. Members are being asked to fight from a very low place, and it affects their work, homelife, and family. It's important to start building that person back up and give them some power back."

Learning for everyone

Thanks to the hard work of Donna, Hamira and the trust's BAME network, Oxfordshire University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust now has a popular Eid celebration as part of its corporate calendar of events.

"The annual Eid celebration includes a learning quiz, with questions like: What are we celebrating? What calendar do we follow? How do patients feel when they have Eid, or what happens when they're fasting?" says Hamira.

She adds that this way of learning initiates helpful conversations and that making the event welcoming

and fun is extremely important.

There is a henna table, and all kinds of food for people to try, as well as a table full of RCN resources.

"It's important to have a comfortable, informal, celebratory environment," she says. "Not just to talk about the things going wrong, but also to talk about what can go right. We're a community inside the hospital, but we're also a community outside the hospital, and it's about linking that all up."

While it has been paused for the past two celebrations due to COVID-19, the event is open to all staff, patients and volunteers, and Donna and Hamira have worked alongside the chaplaincy team and other unions, pooling their resources to make it bigger and better each year.

"It's really lovely to see it as a community event, but within a hospital," says Donna. "Sometimes I think that sense of community is lost in some of the bigger hospitals these days, and events like this can really make the difference."

More information

Find out what the RCN is doing to fight for equality and promote inclusion in the workplace and how you can get involved at rcn.org.uk/diversity-and-inclusion



Student ambassadors

Vice Chair of the RCN Students Committee Scott Doughty explains how student ambassadors can support student members and play a crucial role in RCN campaigns



“Student ambassadors provide a vital link between student members and the RCN Students Committee,” says Scott. “They support students at a local level and feed issues into us nationally.

“They are the voice of the RCN in their universities and try to instil the fire and passion they have in their fellow students.”

Scott, alongside his fellow student committee members, has worked with students and RCN staff to co-develop the student ambassador role. Launched at the end of 2019, it replaces and builds

on the RCN’s former student information officer position.

“The student ambassador role is designed to better support students who want to take on a leadership role,” explains Scott, who is now working to promote and strengthen the role, making sure it’s embedded across the UK and that those in it are well-supported. “We’ve set up an online development resource to support student ambassadors to be active in the role.

“The resource also includes information about how student



In some ways we can roar more loudly while we are students, and we need to harness that strength



➤ Find out more about RCN student ambassadors at rcn.org.uk/student-ambassadors

Words by Zara Davies

ambassadors can link in with other active members such as branch officials, RCN reps, networks and forums.”

Campaigning for the future

The student ambassador role descriptor includes a specific section on campaigning and highlights ways student ambassadors can encourage other students to get involved.

“Issues like fair pay and safe staffing affect us as the future nursing workforce,” says Scott. “But equally, it’s about making changes

to help nursing students. Having enough nursing staff so students can have a good-quality practice experience and making sure nursing staff are paid fairly so people stay in the profession are issues that affect us now.”

Last year, as part of the RCN’s Fund Our Future campaign, which is led by student members, Scott contacted his local MP and arranged a meeting. He used the opportunity to discuss the need to invest in nursing student education and pay nursing staff fairly, pointing out that the two

issues are closely linked in terms of growing the nursing workforce.

Scott’s also passionate about ensuring students get involved in their local RCN branch. He says: “I feel that sometimes the student voice is being lost at a local level and it also offers another way for students to get involved with RCN campaigns.”

Scott adds: “In some ways we can roar more loudly and have a stronger voice while we are students, and we need student ambassadors to help harness that strength.”

RCN student ambassador Gemma Mowbray has been supporting students at her university in Edinburgh during the pandemic

Since starting my course in September, I’ve only visited the university’s campus once. It’s a strange situation not meeting your fellow students or tutors and I’d heard that a lot of students felt nervous about starting their first clinical placements.

I teamed up with another student ambassador and with help from RCN staff, we set up an online event to offer support. We had a great turnout with 40 students attending. The event included advice on how to prepare for placements, what to expect, self-care and how to look after yourself while on shift. We also spoke to our university and managed to get an RCN slot in an online university-wide event with more than 300 students.



To succeed in this role, you need to be self-motivated. You need to go out and make things happen, but there’s lots of support available from the RCN too.

The role can also open the door to other opportunities. I’m now a member of the RCN Lothian and Borders branch committee which is another way I can make sure the student voice is heard.

18 SAFE STAFFING

‘A powerful tool for change’

How to use our groundbreaking new Nursing Workforce Standards to help improve patient safety and staff wellbeing where you work



Stock images

We launched our Nursing Workforce Standards in May to explicitly set out – for the first time – what must happen in workplaces to ensure the delivery of safe and effective patient care.

The 14 standards have been designed for those who fund, plan, commission, design, review and provide services which require a nursing workforce and can be used by members to assess how well their workplaces are supporting staff to do their jobs.

“They’re a powerful tool for change,” says Rachel

Hollis, who chairs the RCN Professional Nursing Committee which oversaw the development of the standards. “They can be used as a benchmark to quality assess services, and where the standards aren’t being met, used by RCN reps to raise concerns.”

While the principles behind the standards aren’t new, it’s the first time they’ve been brought together in one place to represent the ideal approach to workforce planning and management.

They apply across the whole of the UK and to every

setting where nursing care is delivered.

Conversation starter

The full standards have been sent to chief nurses and health care regulators, with a poster summary included with this issue of *Activate*.

Please display this in your workplace and use it to start conversations with members about what they should expect from their employer.

The standards can be used by reps to support individual members but also to work collectively to influence

change either through branch activity or partnership working with other unions and senior management. They're already being used in meetings with directors of nursing and at board level to conduct gap analyses.

"The standards can help you articulate the link between working conditions and patient care," says learning rep Jean Rogers, who's been part of the working group of active members helping to develop the standards and create related resources.

"It's not about asking reps to do more work in their role but giving them an extra tool to help them question poor workforce planning," she says.

"The standards provide the language to help you fight for a consistent approach to safe staffing. Quite often individuals get blamed for making mistakes when there are system-wide issues.

"The standards can support conversations to move from who went wrong and who is to blame, to what went wrong and how do we fix it. They can also be used to help reflect on incidents, write statements and advocate for a safer, more effective nursing workforce."

Though implementation of the standards alone won't resolve staffing issues due to the need to grow the nursing workforce, Rachel believes they could support organisations to retain, recognise and value the staff they do have.

"I'm determined to make sure they don't sit on a shelf," says Rachel. "Let's get the standards out there so they make a real difference to members and the quality of patient care they're able to deliver."

Next steps

We're using the standards as a framework to update our *Ask. Listen. Act.* resource to help reps and branch executives question and influence in their workplaces.

This will be available in the summer, once it's been tested with our group of volunteers.

“

It's not about asking reps to do more work in their role but giving them an extra tool

➤ Find out more:
[rcn.org.uk/
nursingwork
forcestandards](https://rcn.org.uk/nursingwork/forcestandards)

Words by Kim Scott

Five ways to use the standards in your workplace

- 1 In branch meetings to open conversations with members about what they're experiencing.
- 2 To assess how well your employer conducts workforce planning and management.
- 3 To articulate issues and raise concerns.
- 4 To support constructive conversations with nursing leaders around system challenges.
- 5 To start a dialogue with your director of nursing about what changes could be made to improve working conditions and support for members.

20 GET INVOLVED

Congress is coming

With our debate programme now revealed, BJ Waltho says she hopes our first hybrid event on 18 to 20 September will offer something for everyone

Although the pandemic means RCN Congress won't be the same event members are used to, Chair of Congress BJ Waltho says one big advantage is that members will be able to take part in any of the debates or fringe events online.

"Congress is so important and the more people that join in, the better," says BJ. "Now, if members can't join us for the whole three days, they can still dip in and out. It opens it up to more members from across the UK, which is what we've always wanted."

Evolving situation

This year, for the first time, the RCN is planning for Congress to be a hybrid event. Voting members will be able to attend in person in Liverpool should they wish to and if the rules around COVID-19 allow it, and all other members will be able to participate online.

BJ says: "For me, the joy of Congress has always been members getting together and we've had to make some compromises this year. The situation is still evolving, and



we'll keep members updated as we develop plans, but please keep checking the Congress website for updates too.

"It's been a very difficult 18 months for everybody, so the most important thing is that we still have the opportunity

to come together, whether it's in person or online."

BJ adds: "We're going to be reliant on a new platform for online participation, which is exciting and innovative but it's also unknown territory, so my plea is that members bear with us."

The Congress agenda was published in June and BJ says the Agenda Committee hopes it offers something to appeal to every single member.

“We’ve tried to make sure we cover as many different areas of nursing as possible,” says BJ. “Of course, we still have room for emergency agenda items too, which I think is quite pertinent. Nursing is changing at such a speed now – the emergency items allow us to capture those current issues.”

Loud and proud

BJ wants members to be “loud and proud” about what the issues in nursing are and what matters to them as nursing staff. She says that Congress offers the perfect opportunity to do this.

“Nursing staff need to be proud about what our profession has achieved, and we need to be loud about what needs to change,” explains BJ. “That’s what I love about Congress; no matter what the debate is about, members get the message across – whether it’s safe staffing, recruitment or fair pay – they tell the press and public what’s important for nursing staff right now.

“It’s also a chance for members to inform the work of the College. RCN Council – their elected members – are listening. The RCN is a member-led organisation and Congress is one of the best opportunities to get really involved and make sure your voice is heard.”

Fluid and dynamic

As well as debating important nursing matters, BJ says Congress is also a chance to talk about what we need to celebrate in nursing.

“Alongside the debates, the fringe part of Congress is about sharing good practice and knowledge,” she says. “This year, we’ve been able to extend this offer.”

Our new-look Congress fringe, titled the Integrated Education Programme, will bring together fringe events, sponsored sessions, student and nursing support worker events, and health and wellbeing activities, plus a full exhibition experience, all on one virtual platform.

“Overall, Congress will be a much more fluid and dynamic experience,” says BJ. “Members will have more flexibility and opportunities to get involved with the events that they want to take part in. You can make Congress what you want it to be.”

“

You can make Congress what you want it to be

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Words by
Zara Davies

Get the latest on Congress

The situation with COVID-19 restrictions and large gatherings continues to change. It may be possible to offer places to non-voting members in Liverpool once the situation becomes more clear, dependent upon what is possible at the venue nearer the time.

For the latest information, visit rcn.org.uk/congress. Here, you can also find our full Congress agenda, information about our Integrated Education Programme, submitting emergency agenda items and registration, which is open now.

22 FORUM EVENTS

Surprise benefits of going digital

The RCN Education Forum's online conference helped members reconnect after a difficult year



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While COVID-19 has forced many events online, going digital has its advantages say those who helped to organise the recent highly successful RCN Education Forum conference.

“It allowed many people to come along who wouldn't otherwise have been able to attend,” says RCN Education Forum Steering Committee member Dr Rachael Major, a senior lecturer at The Institute in Guernsey. “The

cost was less than a face-to-face event, plus there weren't travel or hotel expenses. It stretched budgets further,” she says.

Getting together

Open to both RCN members and non-members, including students, the national conference held in April was one of the College's biggest online events so far. Titled *Stepping Up: Educating the Workforce in Challenging*

Times, it attracted around 270 attendees over two days.

For many, this was the first real chance to interact with others in their profession since the pandemic began. “People really appreciated that it went ahead,” says Rachael. “They've been wanting to get together and even though we had to do it virtually, it worked really well with some great feedback. People really valued the opportunity to engage with

others, with time out from the work they've been doing."

Other than the keynote speeches, contributions were pre-recorded, but the event remained interactive with those attending able to put their questions forward. There was also networking, with attendees randomly allocated someone to chat with for an initial three minutes that could be extended.

Other advantages included having access to everything that happened at the conference afterwards, because it was all recorded. "Delegates got to see more than they would usually," says Rachael.

The conference ended with a session where attendees could meet the forum's steering committee. "We expected people wouldn't hang around, but they did," says Rachael. "We know members don't know us as well as we'd like. We're keen to know what they want from us, and the discussion helped."

Behind the scenes

Challenges included technology issues. "It took a lot of people behind the scenes to do this," says Rachael. "A lot more than a face-to-face conference. There was a great deal of planning and organising." Rachael adds that input from the RCN's professional leads for education and learning and development across the UK was also crucial to the success of the event.

For Sarah Done, a senior lecturer at Swansea University, who joined

the forum's steering committee in January, many initial concerns proved unfounded. "We were worried about whether we would get the attendance and whether interaction would be possible, but it all worked very well," she says. "It gave the vibe of a live event, which was unexpected. We were delighted."

Particular highlights of the two-day programme included a keynote presentation on the student experience during COVID-19, given by the RCN's Newly Qualified Nurses Network. "It was outstanding," says Sarah. "They generated a real sense of excitement about what the future holds for nursing. I learnt a lot."

“

People really valued the opportunity to engage with others

➤ Many RCN forums are holding appointment processes for steering committee roles this summer. Visit rcn.org.uk/current-elections

Words by
Lynne Pearce

Top tips for organising an online forum event

- **Start early**
"We've already started planning for the next conference which will be held in March next year," says Rachael.
- **Get the whole committee involved**
"We have a committee subgroup which starts the early work, but everyone gets involved in reviewing abstracts and the later stages of planning," explains Rachael.
- **Have back-up plans**
Recording sessions ahead of the event meant the committee could watch these and prepare to step in to facilitate a discussion should any technical issues arise. Sarah says: "You may not need to use your back-up plan, but it gives you confidence knowing you're prepared."
- **Make use of the RCN's events team**
Rachael says: "The team is brilliant and will help guide you through. They are the key people."

The committee will be calling for abstracts for next year's conference soon. Visit rcn.org.uk/education-forum

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