



Royal College
of Nursing

Student ambassadors

RCN Student ambassadors

Making a real difference



Introduction

The RCN Students' Committee provides a voice for the thousands of nursing students who are members of the RCN throughout the UK. Through the student member of Council, the committee can influence RCN policy and strategy on matters relating to student nurses and nursing education. The Students' Committee work closely with RCN Student Ambassadors to find out what issues matter to nursing students across the UK, and to work together to champion the student voice.



I think it's fair to say that most RCN Student Ambassadors become active in the role because they want to support their peers and improve their experiences of academia and clinical placements. However, I personally have gained so much from being an RCN Student Ambassador; from having opportunities to take part in RCN activities to being able to access the additional support and development available.

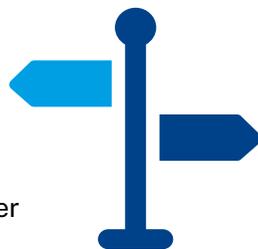
I am pleased to be able to share and celebrate some of the amazing work that our RCN student ambassadors do with you in this resource. I am sure it will inspire you, as it has me, to either join us in becoming an RCN Student Ambassador yourself or continue in that role supporting our student members to flourish during their nursing studies and progress through their nursing careers.

*Heather Massie,
Chair of the RCN
Students' Committee*

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Signposting and supporting

Signposting fellow student members to relevant RCN staff, expert services and resources to support their nursing education and practice experience is a valuable aspect of the student ambassador role. Encouraging peer support is also a crucial element and support tool.



Olatokunbo Afuwape

For three years Olatokunbo has supported students at BPP University in London.

Providing a strong voice about the many benefits of RCN membership, Olatokunbo has encouraged all the nursing students at BPP University both to join and to continue as RCN members. She has taken an active role in campaigning for better financial support for her fellow students, working closely with her branch and lobbying her local MP.



Olatokunbo said “It has been a great experience and I am very grateful for the opportunity. I have now started the transition from a student to a newly-qualified nurse and a fully-fledged member of the RCN and will remain active.”

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Alison Hesford

As an RCN Student Ambassador, Alison has been able to signpost her fellow students to the many services the RCN offers, including counselling (which has been a service in high demand, especially during the pandemic). As a firm believer of students supporting students, this role has enabled Alison to gather relevant information for her peers which may become vital to wellbeing and studies at any point in the future.



The RCN staged several events for the Fair Pay For Nursing campaign, one of which Alison was actively involved in. In September 2021, she was part of the silent pay protest on the steps of the Senedd, where a journalist from *WalesOnline* and *The Western Mail* (Cardiff newspaper) interviewed her on the campaign. She says “I stated the importance of staff retention, the reducing staff numbers, and the need to fill the gap by offering the correct rate of pay that matches the responsibility that the nursing profession holds.”

Being active in campaigns not only provides education on current and future practises in nursing, but it also provides an opportunity to network with likeminded people. Alison says “I hope to be involved in more campaigns in the future as the improvement of care and staff retention may benefit from student input. The student voice may be seen as a small one but it is arguably one of the most important, with the patient voice being at the very top.”

Alison states “If you dream of change and improvement in education and care, this role will give you the opportunity to be part of that in a big way”.

Hannah Serah

Hannah feels privileged to be an RCN Student Ambassador, not only representing students from her own university, but students from different universities too.

“I have had an opportunity to meet with some students from different universities and been able to speak with them. I have explained my role as a student ambassador and have urged them to come forward, speak up and raise any issues or concerns they might have, for me to take them forward and help.”



Hannah has supported several RCN campaigns and informs fellow students about how they can get involved and be heard. She has attended several webinars including safe staffing, vaccinations and pay campaign webinars, which has helped her assist her colleagues and advocate for the RCN.

She encourages students to speak up so she can support them and says “I saw a student who was struggling, so I approached her. She opened up to me and I supported her to move things forward.”

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Connecting and campaigning

Connecting with fellow students to encourage engagement with the work of the RCN, through forums, local branches and the Students' Committee is at the heart of being a student ambassador. Campaigning on student related issues, locally and nationally, ensures your voice as a nursing student is truly heard.



Alisha Brown

As an RCN Student Ambassador, Alisha has attended South East regional meetings each month which has provided her with an opportunity to update the region on what has been happening locally within her university and get advice if there have been any issues. After attending her first student ambassador conference, Alisha decided to write a poem in support of the RCN's *Fair Pay For Nursing* campaign and she shared it on social media. Following this, she spoke at two *Fair Pay For Nursing* rallies sharing the student perspective on why fair pay is important. She has also been involved in the South East region's student ambassador video *What's My Worth?* which was shared on social media to raise awareness of the pay and *Fund Our Future* campaigns.



Alisha says “the opportunities I have been given, and the people I have met, have enriched my learning and experience and empowered me to realise that I’m not ‘just a nursing student’ but a future nurse and my journey starts now. As an RCN Student Ambassador, I have been able to meet students from different universities and create connections with others who share the same passion for nursing. I would recommend anyone to be an RCN Student Ambassador, you will not regret it.”

Alisha got a commendation for the RCN Student Ambassador of the Year award 2021.

Claire Beeton

Claire is an RCN Student Ambassador from Ulster University who has recently been nominated for the Student Voice Champion award for her work to support and inspire nursing students at her university.



Claire helped to plan and organise a series of inspiring wellbeing events for nursing students at her university, from arranging for students to hear from a positive behaviour coach to a speaker who shared her experiences of locked in syndrome. Claire says, “We involved as many students as we could in planning and organising these informal events. They were a lot of fun and the process really developed our teamwork and networking skills.”

When first year nursing students at university were facing the challenge of not being able to meet each other in person due to the COVID-19 restrictions, Claire organised online group chats enabling most of the students in her cohort to get to know each other.

Claire is described as ‘always there’ for struggling nursing students at her university. She is active on social media, using online platforms to educate others about borderline personality disorder and to break down stigmas surrounding mental health conditions, especially within the nursing workforce.

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Catherine McLaughlin

Catherine started her pre-registration nursing education, and role as a student ambassador, at a very complex time – with the possibility of industrial action in Northern Ireland looming.

“We were all very intrigued by the idea of industrial action, especially as it hadn’t happened during the RCN’s history” Catherine says. “I attended some talks, and it quickly became a realisation – how are nursing students going to be affected? We orchestrated conversations between the university and the RCN about how it would affect students – both were brilliant. Deep down as students, we wanted to be a part of it and the university agreed that students should not be in placement on any planned industrial action days; I would say that this was their way of protecting students from not being impacted negatively.”

It was important for Catherine and her fellow students to get out there and support nurses on the picket line. “These are our colleagues” she says. “We wanted to go out there without compromising our position as students. It was the most awe inspiring and empowering time because we felt part of something that was making a difference. It was important that we were able to show that support and I think the nurses appreciated us being there.”

“I am so proud. We were trying to achieve pay parity and the fact we achieved that was incredible. We thought we didn’t have much power, but we really did. To realise what you do has an impact is so inspiring” Catherine says.



Catherine's role as a student ambassador has channelled her passion and energy and she is keen to do more with the RCN to achieve positive changes. She says, "The RCN has been amazing, I've been involved in so many groups at a regional and national level - it energises you to want to do more." Catherine has used the skills acquired throughout her student ambassador journey to help set up a regional network to support newly registered nurses.

Catherine says "as a student ambassador it's been my responsibility to ensure other nursing students are well supported by signposting them to relevant RCN staff, services and resources. My role also meant encouraging other student members to engage with RCN events such as public speaking debates."

Catherine won the RCN Student Ambassador of the Year award in 2021.



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Questioning and influencing

Questioning and influencing at local and national levels is crucial to the enhancement of the nursing profession. The collective student voice is powerful and can have a positive impact on student education and experience.



Carlie Andrews

Carlie is studying a BSc Adult Nursing in Swansea and is an RCN Student Ambassador who has been involved in RCN meetings and campaigning activities throughout her studies.

“In my role, I’ve had meaningful discussions about NHS pay and the current issues students face regarding finances and learning on their course.

I regularly post campaigns on my Twitter and Facebook to encourage engagement from other students and nurse members. Many students have come to me for advice and asked questions and I have been able to signpost them in the right direction.”



Being an RCN Student Ambassador has given Carlie an insight into how both the RCN and NHS works and how nurses can make a valuable contribution to health care and public policy in the UK. Carlie says “I have seen how hard the RCN works to make sure nurses’ voices are heard, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The role has helped me develop my voice, leadership and teamwork techniques which are essential skills and will help me once I qualify”.

Carlie enjoys working with her fellow student ambassadors and RCN Reps in contributing to the development of the nursing profession and “encourages any student to consider joining us!”

Bethany Gladstone

Bethany has spent the past year focusing on the progress and development of her university cohort who have had differing needs at the start of their nursing education. With differing levels of education and backgrounds, and some with a large gap in education before returning to nursing, she has embraced the student ambassador role to ensure that they thrive.



By helping cohorts with revision resources and creating her own quizzes she works hard to ensure her colleagues are supported and is always available should they have questions or need advice.

Bethany says “My cohort is full of the most incredible people and I am so happy to be in a position to help them. We have overcome many challenges, and all with smiles on our faces.”

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Scott Doughty

Scott has worked with student ambassadors and RCN staff to co-develop the student ambassador role, which was launched at the end of 2019, and is now working to make sure the role is embedded across the UK and that student ambassadors are well supported.



“Campaigning and influencing is a key aspect of the student ambassador role,” says Scott, who is also vice chair of the RCN Students’ Committee. “Student ambassadors drive the voice of the RCN at their universities. Part of the role is about trying to instil that fire and passion you have in fellow students and colleagues.”

Students can make a difference by campaigning, talking about these issues to other students, liking and sharing social media posts and using their voice. Scott says: “When it comes to the campaigning aspect, you’re not going to make changes straight away. Issues like fair pay and safe staffing affect us as the future nursing workforce. But equally, it’s about making changes for future students so it’s important that we get involved.

As a committee member, Scott has a regular slot in the Northern region’s quarterly member newsletter. He offers different student ambassadors across the region the opportunity to write something in each issue, highlighting how they’re supporting students to campaign.

As well as allowing student members to get more involved during their course, the student ambassador role supports students who want to develop into future leadership roles. Scott adds: “Student members can play a crucial role in RCN campaigns. 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.”

A message from Rachel Wood, RCN Professional Learning and Development Lead for Student members

“I remain inspired and deeply impressed by the passion and commitment that so many of our students demonstrate in their active roles as RCN Student Ambassadors. Juggling the many challenges of student life, our RCN Student Ambassadors still find the time to listen to the concerns of their peers, supporting them by signposting to RCN professional and trade union resources. Through their work they influence the future of nursing and nurses. It is such a privilege to finish my professional nursing career working and support those at the beginning of theirs.

I hope that these case studies inspire you to support RCN Student Ambassadors, and if appropriate, consider taking up the role yourself.”



Further resources:

RCN Student Ambassador role descriptor

RCN Student Ambassador support and development flyer



For more information on the role and how to become a student ambassador please visit:

rcn.org.uk/get-involved/get-involved-as-a-student

