

# Courageous about Equality and Bold about Inclusion

Equality and Inclusion Strategy: 2017-2020

CORPORATE





Royal College  
of Nursing

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# 1. Introduction

We are experiencing a period of unprecedented political, economic and social uncertainty.

Although we can't yet be sure of what the changing environment will mean for nursing and nurses in the long term; it remains clear that we are required to be bolder and more courageous in advocating for the centrality of equality and inclusion. These themes grow in importance when we explore how to improve outcomes for nurses, health care support workers and students in the workplace and for patients wherever care is provided.

It is hard to imagine a future for nursing that does not contain clear commitment and action towards equality, inclusion and human rights as integral to achieving our goals of shaping and influencing health and health policy.

We believe that a nursing profession that is emboldened, empowered and better equipped to face the challenges of the future with the knowledge that equality, inclusion and human rights is an important building block to securing a better future for the art and science of nursing.

Equality, inclusion, diversity and human rights provide a foundation for a modern and forward-looking profession where nurses, health care support workers, and students, regardless of the sector that they work in or their field of practice, can continue to transform their working environments and the care they deliver to patients.

Our strength comes from our unity. Our membership of more than 435,000 health care professionals who are diverse and dedicated to the cause of their patients deserve to work in environments that are healthy, dignified, safe and free from discrimination.

Our new equality and inclusion strategy will enable us to scope, plan and begin delivery in new priority areas that will become increasingly important for our members in the coming years and beyond.

## 2. Strategic vision

At its heart, the RCN seeks to be a world-class champion of equality, inclusion and human rights issues across the depth and breadth of the health and social care sector. We will celebrate our diversity as well as embrace that which unites us as a community and movement of health care professionals.

We will boldly and courageously advocate for the needs of our diverse membership by providing advice, information and support that promotes inclusion and implements equality of opportunity by confronting inequality in the workplace. We will also ensure that our campaigning and promotional material reflect these priorities.

As both a trade union and a professional association we will harness our influence and collective resources in order to work with, and constructively challenge, policymakers, employers, service providers and other stakeholders to realise the tangible benefits of promoting inclusion and implementing equality for nursing, health care and health policy.

We will champion and defend equality, inclusion and human rights in the workplace and seek to extend remedies and protections for those who experience or are at risk of experiencing discrimination both through the workplace representation that we provide and the campaigning activity that we engage in.

We will promote inclusive workplace practices through conversations, advice and guidance provided to our stakeholders, both as they relate to the working environment and as they extend to impact on patient experience.

We will find ways to challenge poor workplace practices that disadvantage RCN members on the grounds of their protected characteristics and prompt tangible change through research.

### **The protected characteristics are defined by the Equality Act 2010 and are shown below.**

- Age.
- Disability.
- Gender.
- Gender identity.
- Sexual orientation.
- Marriage and civil partnership.
- Pregnancy and maternity.
- Race, ethnicity or nationality.
- Religion, faith or belief.

Equality legislation in Northern Ireland also includes political opinion and status as a carer into the protection of law.

## Developing the strategy

This strategy outlines the issues that will provide an overarching framework for action across the RCN. It intends to help sculpt future policy and operations as well as inform current thinking and activity in this area.

In developing this strategy, we drew extensively on research and evidence gathered from across the UK from agencies including the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission Northern Ireland as well as number of other organisations. We also drew on information generated by our own patterns of casework as well as emergent equality, inclusion and human rights intelligence from the health and social care sector itself. Central to the development of the strategy has been the narratives provided by our members about their own experiences and expectations. This has contoured the strategy's focus at the micro-level of interaction with its desire to 'change the conversation' about workplace equality and inclusion and to strengthen the link between inclusive practice, staff engagement and better outcomes for patients. We will continue to survey this changing terrain for research, best practice as well as feedback and intelligence that enables us to constantly improve and extend the reach and impact of the implementation of this strategy throughout its period of operation.

Leadership remains integral to the delivery and implementation of the strategy. Such leadership will need to be visible and evident in the underpinning actions plans that will be developed by the various countries, regions and directorates that form the RCN. This approach focuses on providing the agility needed to deliver a high-degree of customisation rather than impose a one-size fits all approach that ignores the deep-seated complexity that often plays out across the UK.

## Structuring the strategy

This strategy is designed to be memorable in its simplicity. It contains a clear direction of travel which is supported by five strategic themes and underpinned by one key performance indicator, which are briefly outlined below.

## Our direction of travel

The RCN seeks to be a world-class champion of equality, inclusion and human rights across the health and social care sector and this means that we will be more courageous in fighting for equality and bolder in our work to promote inclusion.

## 3. Strategic priorities



### Challenge and change

This strategic priority focuses on the importance of the RCN generating a robust and compelling evidence base through which to challenge employers, service providers and policy makers to initiate structural, long-term positive change and deliver better outcomes for all RCN members. In turn, ensuring that nurses and health care support workers can work in environments that are fully inclusive and are free from unlawful discrimination.

integral to RCN's ability to enhance the support provided to our members in accessing remedies to unlawful discrimination and forms of disadvantage in the workplace.

An important element of the strategy also focuses on building knowledge and skills that help to promote inclusion and tackle inequality amongst our wider membership.



### Connect and communicate

This strategic priority refers to our ability to demonstrate leadership by articulating a clear and compelling narrative that promotes equality and inclusion. It is intended to strengthen the link between workplace inclusion, engagement and ultimately the delivery of better outcomes for patients. It is envisaged that this narrative will be widely shared and will focus on the importance of inclusive systems, organisational design and culture as well as leadership practice.



### Identity and intersectionality

This strategic priority focuses on identity and intersectionality which is the view that an individual can face multiple causes of discrimination and disadvantage when their protected characteristics and other identities overlap, such as race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Within the context of this strategic theme, is the intention to broaden and deepen our understanding and deployment of engagement techniques. In particular, we will explore how we interact with our members and how we facilitate member-to-member engagement.

This may be seen in the ways that black and minority ethnic women might face forms of sexism in the workplace which is compounded by racism. The concept of intersectionality is traditionally applied to women but it is not only women who are impacted by the multiplicity of their identities. Taking such an approach enables the RCN to better reflect and respond to the range of experiences that RCN members may be subjected to as a result of their identity or the combinations of their protected characteristics and socio-economic circumstances; that may lead to inequality, disadvantage or less-favourable outcomes.



### Equip and inform

Central to building our capability as a force for positive change in the arena of equality and inclusion is the need to strengthen the continuing learning and development provided to our accredited representatives on a wide range of equality and inclusion issues. This remains

This strategy seeks to tackle the impact of severe and persistent disadvantage faced by groups with protected characteristics. Our scope also includes those groups identified by equality legislation in operation in Northern Ireland. Of particular concern are those who possess protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and other equality legislation in operation across Northern Ireland.



## Inspire and activate

Empowerment is a vital component of this strategy as there is evidence that those who experience chronic levels of inequality and discrimination tend to have less voice and influence in the decisions that impact on them. Empowering our members to have more voice, influence and to have control in their professional career, and building their capability to act to achieve a specific outcome related to their treatment at work, is an important part of nurturing and growing a community of activism within the RCN. A key goal is to inspire those RCN members who have not previously thought about becoming an accredited representative to be positively stimulated by the idea of other forms of activism to help exert influence in the workplace, whilst using equality and inclusion as a focus through which a broader programme is delivered.



## What we will do

The strategy outlines a series of key strategic actions to be taken by the RCN, primarily led by the Membership Relations Directorate. These actions will provide a core of activity and knowledge that will support actions generated across the whole of the RCN.



## Review and evaluation

Our learning and progress will be reviewed on a regular basis. Changes and improvements will be made to respond to what we learn about what works well in delivering the change we want to see and as a result of significant changes to the external environment.



## What we will measure

Implementing this strategy will mean that across the different countries, directorates and regions, a wealth of planning and performance indicators will be generated. These will be an integral part of the mainstreaming process. This strategy remains focused on achieving greater levels of satisfaction amongst members, in terms of their protected characteristics, with the services they have received from the RCN. The RCN will subsequently seek to eliminate negative differences in satisfaction.

Priority area	Key milestones	Indicative timetable and headline actions
<b>Connect and communicate</b>	<p>The organisation is bolder and more robust about its equality and inclusion messaging to members and stakeholders across a broad range of areas from professional nursing guidance, employment relations negotiations, policy consultations and research and generic operations.</p>	<p>Year 1: Deliver learning and development about the strategy to key internal audiences.</p> <p>Years 1, 2, 3: All countries, directorates and regions are required to develop and implement an equalities and inclusion action plan with performance indicators to implement the broader strategy with support and advice from the Membership Relations Directorate.</p>
	<p>There is a shared understanding of what the organisation wants to achieve in relation to the implementation of equality and the promotion of inclusion with a range of constituencies across the health and social care sectors in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>Years 1, 2, 3: There is extensive sharing of the strategy document and its intent at all levels both internally and externally.</p> <p>Year 1: Research undertaken on the most effective methods of communicating equality and inclusion methods to RCN members and to wider stakeholder groups across the health and social care sector.</p> <p>Year 1: Relaunch the Diversity Champions with a rebrand which explicitly references inclusion and has a focus on inclusive nursing practice.</p> <p>Year 1: Engage executive nursing leaders (from both public and independent sectors) across the UK on the Inclusive leadership conversation via a Nursing Leadership Inclusion Summit.</p> <p>Year 2: Engage middle-level/senior nursing managers in conversations about the benefits of implementing inclusive leadership models for health care.</p> <p>Years: 1, 2, 3: Engage the wider RCN membership in the inclusion conversation using opportunities such as revalidation and a focus on patient care to broaden and deepen this dialogue and understanding.</p>
<b>Identity and intersectionality</b>	<p>The RCN is agile and responsive to the plurality of the member experience which is given both voice and agency through enhanced methods of engagement.</p>	<p>Year 1: Research good practice on engaging with difference across a range of sectors and draw on a multiplicity of models of engagement. Build on the work already in progress or completed on member-to-member engagement. Pilot and test.</p> <p>Year 1: Research good practice across a range of sectors and draw on a multiplicity of models of engagement. Pilot, test and scale as appropriate.</p> <p>Year 1: Develop guidance that enables interaction between established and new models of member engagement and self-organisation that optimises their interaction and impact.</p> <p>Year 2: Roll out and organise an annual equalities and inclusion conference as part of a wider platform of events which support equality/inclusion initiatives taking place across various regions and countries. This conference will be produced on behalf of the RCN Trade Union Committee and will provide space for considering specific equality and inclusion issues raised by members through the new engagement models.</p> <p>Year 3: Evaluate and embed.</p>

Priority area	Key milestones	Indicative timetable and headline actions
<p><b>Equip and inform</b></p>	<p>RCN representatives both established and newly-accredited have enhanced skills in challenging discrimination and promoting inclusion in the workplace.</p>	<p>Year 1: Research what best practice looks like across other trade unions and comparable professional organisations globally with regards to the provision of online learning and development that is engaging, accessible and effective for both accredited representatives and members. Recommend and design changes in consultation with accredited representative committees.</p> <p>Years 2 and 3: Deliver enhanced learning and development to ALL accredited representatives with content that reflects the specific country-context where appropriate.</p> <p>Year 2: Deliver a Building Better Partnerships event as part of a programme of skill and capacity building for all accredited representatives on strengthening partnership working through a focus on equality and inclusion and consult on the desirability of specific events across the UK-wide context.</p>
	<p>All RCN members are empowered to promote inclusion and challenge inequality in the workplace through access to interactive online resources that provide comprehensive assistance and information about tackling discrimination and promoting inclusion in the workplace and in personal practice. These will include tackling workplace discrimination in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• age</li> <li>• disability</li> <li>• gender/sex gender identity</li> <li>• political opinion (NI)</li> <li>• pregnancy and maternity</li> <li>• marriage/civil partnership</li> <li>• race, ethnicity and/or nationality</li> <li>• religion, faith or belief</li> <li>• sexual orientation</li> <li>• promoting inclusive practice and addressing the wider determinants of health.</li> </ul>	<p>Years 2 and 3: Devise and deliver online learning and support tools based on the learning derived from research and consultation to empower all RCN members to build their skills and resources in identifying and tackling workplace discrimination, as well as promote inclusion in the workplace and in relation to patient care.</p>
	<p>The capability of RCN officers and senior officers as well as first customer-contact staff enhanced by providing advanced learning and development in identifying and responding to discrimination and inequality in the workplace.</p>	<p>Years 1, 2, 3: Learning and development is provided to RCN officers and senior officers as well as first-contact staff.</p> <p>Years 1, 2, 3: Learning and development about inclusive nursing practice is shared with professional nursing leads.</p>

Priority area	Key milestones	Indicative timetable and headline actions
<p><b>Inspire and activate</b></p>	<p>The RCN successfully motivates previously inactive members onto an escalator of activism through a focus on equality and inclusion.</p>	<p>Year 1: Research examples of good and innovative practice in similar and other organisations and build this into the concept of the inclusion café, where RCN members are given tools for talking about inclusion and equality in the workplace and are empowered to find and implement solutions locally.</p> <p>Year 1: To research and review good practice on the development of roles with a focus on equality and inclusion that stop short of formal accredited representative accreditation.</p> <p>Year 2: Pilot and evaluate.</p> <p>Year 3: Roll-out and scale.</p>
	<p>The RCN support offer for RCN members who are not part of the NMC register is strengthened through focusing on implications of caring as a gendered entity. The offer also works to build a diverse talent pool from which to draw on in the development of accredited representatives for the future.</p>	<p>Year 1: Research and consolidate good and innovative practice on the development and implementation of online empowerment programmes that recognise potential constraints to inclusion as a result of socio-economic circumstances as well their connection with protected characteristics.</p> <p>Year 2: Develop and test an online empowerment programme aimed at health care support workers that focuses on the development of a range of core life skills which could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building confidence</li> <li>• identifying priorities</li> <li>• assertiveness skills</li> <li>• building personal support networks.</li> </ul> <p>Years 2 and 3: Roll-out and scale following detailed evaluation from a pilot site.</p> <p>Year 3: Give consideration to creating an award of merit for members who demonstrated excellence in this area.</p>
<p><b>Challenge and change</b></p>	<p>The RCN uses a strong evidence base to provide clear and constructive challenge to employers and service providers to improve outcomes for nurses.</p>	<p>Year 1: Identify a specific set of research questions that generate a robust evidence base and creates the foundation of a campaign that impacts on the employment experience of RCN members. The campaign creates a platform that enables the RCN to challenge systemic poor practice and hold employers and policy makers accountable for the changes that they deliver.</p> <p>Years 2 and 3. Publish research and design a clear campaign with specific and measurable asks of employers and service providers.</p> <p>Years 1,2,3 Equality and inclusion is an appropriately defined element in collective bargaining arrangements and evidence gathering at national, regional and local level where appropriate.</p>

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes  
excellence in practice and shapes health policies

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