

The logo for the RCN Student Festival 2026 is centered within a large circular gradient that transitions from light cyan at the top to a deeper blue at the bottom. The text "RCN STUDENT" is in white, bold, sans-serif font. "FESTIVAL" is in a multi-colored, stylized font where each letter is composed of different colored blocks (purple, orange, yellow, pink, blue). The letter 'I' in "FESTIVAL" is replaced by a vertical orange zigzag line, and the letter 'V' has a small red asterisk above it. "2026" is in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**RCN  
STUDENT  
FESTIVAL  
2026**

# **Event Programme**

# Contents

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.....	1
Event Programme.....	1
Line-up.....	3
General information.....	4
Session info .....	7
Exclusive RCN Shop Discount .....	15
Exhibitors and member services.....	16
Upcoming RCN Student Events.....	17

# Line-up

## RCN STUDENT FESTIVAL



### 2026 LINE UP

**10:30 Gates Open!**

*Grab your lanyard and fuel up on breakfast bites!*

**11:15 Main Stage  
Opening Act:**

*Joshua Parker-Walsh  
& Lorraine Greathead*

**11:30 Nursing in the  
Northwest**

*Simon Browes*

**12:00 Icebreaker: Meet Your  
People**

*Will Malcher*

**12:15 The Global  
Spotlight Set**

*Sala Khulumula*

**12:45 Food Court &  
Festival Fringe**

*Explore, eat & network*

**14:00 Beyond the Ward:  
Alternative Careers**

*Panel Discussion & Q+A*

**14.30 The Catalyst Set:  
Activism Workshop**

*Safiah Fardin*

**15.15 Break**

*Time to recharge*

**15.30 My Research Journey:  
Tales of the  
Unexpected**

*Prof. Michelle Howarth*

**16:00 The Ascend Set  
Leadership workshop**

*Vanessa Coelho*

**16.45 AI is Changing Nursing ...  
Are You Ready?**

*James Carney & Alan  
Chalkley*

**17.15 Closing Set**

*Joshua Parker-Walsh &  
Lorraine Greathead*

**17.30 Grab your goodie bag  
before you go!**

**#RCNstudentfest**

# General information

## Conference enquiries

Please ask staff on the registration desk if you have any specific requirements regarding access, lost property or have queries regarding your membership.

## Specific requirements

Please ask at the registration/enquiries desk if you have any specific requirements (e.g. dietary, accessibility etc.)

## Liability

The RCN will not accept any liability for loss or damage to personal effects which may arise as a result of attendance at this event.

## Venue Overview

### Address:

Freight Island, The Plant Room, 11 Baring St, Manchester, M1 2PY

### Access:

- 2 minutes' walk from Picadilly station
- Exit station via the back entrance on Fairfield Street

### No smoking or vaping:

- Smoking and vaping are not permitted inside the venue.

## Food and drink

- Refreshments will be available throughout the day
- Lunch voucher provided to use at any of the 8 food vendors. [See options here.](#)

# Safety & Wellbeing Guide

## Your Safety

- **Security & stewards:** On hand all day – look for high-vis vests.
- **Emergency exits:** Clearly marked – know your nearest exit.
- **Fire alarm:** Continuous alarm = evacuate calmly with staff guidance.
- **Lost property:** Bring items to the registration desk.

## Your Wellbeing

- **First aid:** Available – ask any steward for help.
- **Water stations:** Refill points are available throughout the venue – stay hydrated.
- **Toilets & accessible facilities:** Located outside The Plant Room, follow signs through the food hall.

## Code of Conduct – [RCN Respect Charter](#)

We're committed to a respectful, inclusive and safe space for everyone.

By attending, you agree to:

- Be kind, respectful and professional.
- Treat everyone equally – no bullying, harassment or discrimination.
- Use inclusive and respectful language.
- Respect personal space and boundaries.
- Report any concerns to RCN staff or stewards.

 This event follows the [RCN Respect Charter](#). Breaches may result in removal from the event.

## Accessibility Support

- Fully accessible venue with step-free routes.
- Accessible toilets
- Speak to the Info Desk if you need extra support.

## Contacts

- **RCN registration desk:** Please visit registration desk for any information
- **Security or emergency help:** Speak to any steward
- **Serious emergency:** Call 999 and alert a steward immediately

## Look After Yourself and Each Other

We want you to enjoy the day, connect with others, and feel supported. If you need help at any point, just ask – we're here for you.

## Session info

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**Session title:** Nursing in the North West

**Session abstract:** Overview of the history and future of nursing in the region

**Speaker:** Simon Browes, Regional Director, RCN

**Biography:**

I have spent more than 25 years practising across community, public health, and mental health services. I currently work as Regional Director for the North West at the Royal College of Nursing, leading the regional team in supporting and representing nurses and nursing.

What matters most to me is how we value people; patients, colleagues, and ourselves. My approach is shaped by person-centred values and a strong belief that relationships are at the centre of good care and good leadership. I'm interested in people, how teams work, how cultures develop, and how we create workplaces where people feel safe, respected, and able to do their best.

Over the years I've worked in clinical, leadership, and academic roles in the NHS and beyond. I care about doing things well, using evidence sensibly, and improving systems in ways that make a real difference to people.



**Session title:** Icebreaker: meet your people

**Speaker:** Will Malcher, Professional Lead for Students (UK), RCN Institute.

**Biography:** Will is a senior nurse, associate lecturer and researcher in infectious diseases. He received the Florence Nightingale Award for his work on COVID 19. Will empowers student nurses through leadership, activism and inclusion. He amplifies student voices, supports networks and shapes strategic engagement across the UK, inspiring the next generation.



**Session title:** The Global Spotlight Set

**Speaker:** Elsa Afonso, Head of the International Academy, Royal College of Nursing

**Biography:** Elsa is Head of the International Academy, where she leads global health programmes across Sri Lanka, Malawi, and the UK Overseas Territories. With a background in neonatal intensive care and humanitarian nursing, she has worked in clinical, academic, and educational roles across Europe and Africa. Elsa lectures internationally, contributes to global nursing curricula, and is actively engaged in research and professional development.



**Session title:** Beyond the Ward: Alternative Careers – panel discussion and Q & A

**Panellist:** Angie McDonald, Lead for IHSC in the Northern Region, RCN

**Biography:** With over 30 yrs of nursing experience, I have built a diverse and rewarding career across multiple pathways in healthcare. I began in Medical Haematology wards across several NHS trusts, where I developed a strong clinical foundation before progressing into leadership as ward sister. My career then progressed across offender health, community nursing, and specialist palliative care, working both in the community settings and prisons.

Throughout these roles, I have leadership positions at local, regional, and national levels, contributing to service development and improving care some of the most vulnerable populations.

I am currently working with the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) as the interim Lead for IHSC in the Northern Region. I continue to influence practice, policy, and professional standards. I am very passionate about answering any questions you may have on the wide-ranging opportunities within nursing that you too can explore in the profession."



**Session title:** Beyond the Ward: Alternative Careers – panel discussion and Q & A

**Speaker:** Luke Evans, RCN Public Health Forum Chair and Assistant Delivery Manager in Health Equity – Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust

**Panellist:** Luke qualified as a nurse in 2012 and has since completed his Professional Diploma in Tropical Nursing and his Masters in Global Public Health. He has worked across various sectors including local government, international medical assistance, pharmaceuticals, health innovation networks and the NHS.

He’s been published in the British Journal of Nursing and Primary Care Nursing journals. He has worked on various public health initiatives such as on the national team leading the Innovation for Health Inequalities Programme (InHIP) and performed a review of Health and Wellbeing roles within the NHS.

Luke is currently working in Health Equity, building the intelligence, infrastructure and interventions within his trust to deliver services that provide equitable access, experiences and outcomes for their patients.



**Session title:** Beyond the Ward: Alternative Careers – panel discussion and Q & A

**Panellist:** Dr Melanie Stephens, Associate Professor in Adult Nursing at the University of Salford, NIHR RRDN Northwest Residential Settings, Lead Visiting Professor at Trinity College Dublin

**Biography:** Dr Melanie Stephens is an Associate Professor in Adult Nursing at the University of Salford, NIHR RRDN Northwest Residential Settings Lead and Visiting Professor at Trinity College Dublin. Prior to joining the University 24 years ago, Melanie worked across many interprofessional teams in the fields of Diabetes, Burns and Plastic Surgery, ICU and Tissue Viability.

After joining the university Melanie led the development of innovative interprofessional and international education and placement opportunities for undergraduate students. Melanie is now a social and health care researcher, who still contributes to the under and postgraduate programmes. She has conducted research in the social care sector evaluating the impact of pressure redistributing chairs and nighttime positioning equipment.

Recently she has led interprofessional studies with colleagues regarding collaborative learning in practice, virtual wound care clinics and placements in Uganda, and more recently the impact of interprofessional student training care homes across Greater Manchester, and nurse led diabetic foot clinics and self-management education programmes in Uganda.



**Session title:** Beyond the Ward: Alternative Careers – panel discussion and Q & A

**Panellist:** Antonia Philp, Paediatric Nurse (BNurs Hons 2008) and Nurseem Co-founder

**Biography:** Nurseem was launched in 2012 after Antonia, a newly qualified Paediatric nurse ended up having to take time off work with severe contact Dermatitis due to the necessary but excessive hand washing that is required in healthcare. She knew she was not alone in this problem so herself and her Co-founder set about developing their own Hand Cream formula, avoiding the usual harsh, synthetic ingredients that are contained in a lot of Hand creams.

The core of Nurseem is a one for one ethos called the Nurseem Promise, whereby for every product they sell they give a month's worth of Free hand care to a Nurse, Midwife or Healthcare Professional in the NHS. To date they have delivered around 750,000 months' worth of Free Hand care and are on track to deliver their Millionth promise by early next year.

**Session title:** The Catalyst Set: Activism Workshop

**Speaker:** Safiah Fardin, Activism Engagement Officer, RCN Institute

**Biography:**



**Session title:** My Research Journey: Tales of the Unexpected

**Speaker:** Michelle Howarth, Professor in Health and Social Care

**Biography:** Dr Michelle Howarth is a Professor of Health and Social Care whose career is grounded in nursing and extensive health sector experience. Her research specialises in nature-based interventions (NBIs) for wellbeing, with a particular focus on the vital contribution of the VCSE sector and strengths-based approaches such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). She has an established track record in advancing the evidence base for NBIs as a core component of social prescribing and works closely with a wide range of organisations to ensure that research is both meaningful and impactful.

Michelle recently completed the NASP review and the Greater Manchester economic evaluation of green social prescribing, and she is a Co-Investigator on the GREENME project. She leads the international Academic and Practitioner Nature Network, a vibrant collaboration that brings together delivery partners, researchers and service users to advance practice and knowledge in nature-based health. Michelle also authored the Greater Manchester State of the Sector report and has undertaken a national evaluation of social prescribing for children and young people.

Her research focuses on the impact of nature on wellbeing, particularly for people living in areas of deprivation. This work has informed service design, programme development and strategic direction across the Greater Manchester Nature for Health Programme, supporting the scale-up of inclusive, evidence-based nature initiatives. Michelle's research outcomes highlight significant influences on public health, especially mental health and the management of long-term conditions.

**Session Abstract:** “My Research Journey – Tales of the Unexpected,” offers a reflective exploration of Professor Michelle Howarth’s professional and academic trajectory, tracing over two decades of experience across nursing practice, research, and leadership. It provides a candid and highly personal account of her progression from front-line staff nurse to Professor in Health and Social Care, highlighting the critical influences, turning points, and values that have shaped her work. This presentation provides a narrative of an individual career, and a broader commentary on the evolution of health and social care research that foregrounds person-centredness, challenges established norms, and advocates for the recognition and integration of social care as a vital field of practice.

**Learning Outcomes:** At the end of the session participants will be able to understand and describe

- 1: Person centred approaches to care
- 2: The work of the Social Care Nursing Advisory Council
- 3: Routes to a research career

**Recommended reading list/references:** Howarth, ML., Su, L., Relph, N., Foster, V., & Fletcher, K. (2025) Economic Evaluation of the Greater Manchester Nature for Health Programme. ISBN: 1-900230-71-2 978-1-900230-71-1 Howarth M, Feather, J, Allen, E., Kaehne, A., Carreon, P. (2025) Linking Up: The Impact of Transformational Leadership Approaches on a Social Prescribing LINK Children and Young People Service. A Qualitative Exploration. Accepted for publication in Health & Social Care in the Community. Rushton, M., Howarth, M. and Iles-Smith, H. (n.d.) Discharge after coronary artery bypass grafting: A qualitative study highlighting the need for individualised, person-centred care. University of Salford, UK and Edge Hill University, UK.

# Exclusive RCN Shop Discount

**£15 discount for members attending the event!**

**Buy online on the RCN Shop and get up to £15 off\* at checkout with code **STUDENTFESTIVAL** or scan the QR below to apply discount automatically to your basket. \*Offer valid until 30th June. Limited to one use per member. Min purchase £5.**



Discover a special memento from our range of nursing merchandise - from tote bags and clothing to stationary, books, and thoughtful gifts. Whether you're treating yourself or surprising a colleague, nurse, midwife, or Nursing Support Worker in your life, there is something for everyone.

All proceeds from the RCN shop will go into supporting our members. Over 500,000 nurses, nursing students, midwives and NSWs.



To contact us: [shop@rcn.org.uk](mailto:shop@rcn.org.uk)

# Exhibitors and member services

NurseM

[RCN Shop](#)

[RCN Learn](#)

[RCN Library](#)

[Early Career Network](#)

[Member Support Services](#)

## Upcoming RCN Student Events

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RCN Student Ambassador Conference 2026 – Wednesday 18 November  
2026, RCN HQ, London

[Student Organising Workshop](#) – Friday 21 August 2026, RCN Wales, Cardiff

[NHSE Webinar Inspiring Conversations](#) Wednesday 1 July 2026, Online

**Tel: 020 7647 3577**

**Web: [www.rcn.org.uk/events](http://www.rcn.org.uk/events)**

**Email: [rcnevents@rcn.org.uk](mailto:rcnevents@rcn.org.uk)**