

## Notes

### RCN Defence Nurses Forum Annual Strategy Day

Tuesday 31 March 2026 at London HQ Room G01

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| <p><b>Forum Committee Members</b></p> <p>Neil Gilbert (Chair)<br/>Mark Cadman<br/>Rebecca Crisp<br/>Megan Henson<br/>Fera MacMillan<br/>Suzanne Turner</p> | <p><b>RCN Staff</b><br/>Denise Alexis (DA) Project Coordinator</p> <p><b>Guest</b><br/>Rachel Allen<br/>Colonel Margaret Hodge</p> |
| <p><b>Apologies</b><br/>Danielle Cording<br/>Kendal Andreason<br/>Drew Temple-Mabe</p>   |  |

## Agenda Items

| No | Description   |
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| 1  | <p><b>Introductions &amp; Apologies</b></p> <p>Neil welcomes the steering committee to their 2026 strategy day meeting and a brief introduction from each committee member and guests.</p>  |
| 2  | <p><b>Forum Information:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Forum Membership =1290 (growth of 146 members over the past year)</li> <li>➤ Facebook engagement <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/RCNDefenceNursingForum">https://www.facebook.com/groups/RCNDefenceNursingForum</a> 806 members</li> <li>➤ Review of annual report</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defence nurses are underrepresented in Forum primary memberships due to specialty alignment (e.g. ED, critical care listing as primary)</li> <li>• Engagement challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Declining impact of traditional social media platforms</li> <li>○ Email fatigue within Defence communications</li> <li>○ Need for targeted, purposeful communication</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Key point:</b> Engagement must be purposeful and value-driven, not platform-driven. Committee to increase forum membership and look at how they can engage with forum members.</p> |
| 3  | <p><b>Committee Updates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Professional lead update – will be discussed at the monthly DNF teleconference.</li> <li>➤ Forum Chair update – no updates</li> <li>➤ Committee member updates</li> <li>➤ Strengthen member engagement by adopting more inclusive language that reflects both military and civilian audiences, while exploring opportunities to work with Defence Primary Health Care (DPHC).</li> </ul> <p><b>CNO Defence Direction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmed shift from <i>framework development</i> to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strategic delivery</li> <li>○ Workforce alignment</li> <li>○ Pay, role clarity, and capability</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Upcoming changes expected around:</li> </ul>  |

- Pay Review Body outcomes
- Competency-based frameworks
- Advanced and enhanced practice definitions

#### Workforce Pressures Identified

- Civilian Defence nurses:
  - Limited career progression
  - Static roles despite experience
  - Workforce motivation primarily driven by work-life balance
- Significant inconsistency across units:
  - Nurse-led vs medically dominated models
  - Variable use of prescribing and advanced practice
- Governance burden disproportionately affects nurses compared to doctors

#### 4 Congress Planning (2026)

Committee discuss the Congress agenda items and how do they represent the voting views of the DNF membership.

- Defence Nursing Forum has **one formal vote at RCN Congress**. MC (Mon-Tue), ST (Wed), NG (Thu).
- Need to ensure:
  - Clear briefing for voting and reserve delegates
  - Awareness of politically sensitive motions
- Initial assessment: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Congress/Agenda>
  - Motions requiring abstention likely (e.g. access to medicinal cannabis, specialist pain services, this can veer into the assisted dying bill, bank rates, eye donation, national safety standards for lone working, unpaid hours and uptake of physical health checks)
  - Forum broadly supports motions on:
    - Psychological safety
    - Advanced practice protection
    - Workforce wellbeing (with Defence caveats)

#### Action:

- Robust pre-brief for Congress representatives.


#### 5 Professional Resource for Nurses New to Defence

Committee discuss how they will take this work forward and deliver the updated resource.

- Current version published 2018 – no longer fit for purpose
- Agreed approach:
  - Rewrite and expand, not lightly amend
  - Include military and civilian nurses
  - Align with Defence Nursing Framework
  - Reduce policy-heavy language
  - Include signposting rather than static links
  - Forward from the RCN CEO
  - Rewrite the social media section

#### Key enhancements:

- Clear distinction between:
  - Newly qualified nurses
  - Experienced nurses new to Defence
- Voices / case studies from:
  - Army, Navy, RAF, and civilians

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|    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Welfare, governance, CPD, operational expectations</li> <li>○ Defence acronyms and “what I wish I’d known”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Professional images needed</li> <li>• Plan for regular review (3-year cycle)</li> </ul> <p><b>Deadline:</b> End of Summer 2026</p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ALL</b> - Each member to agree which section they would like to lead on within the document.</li> <li>• <b>DA</b> – speak to comms re: updated images</li> </ul>  |
| 6. | <p><b>RCN Support Team Engagement</b></p> <p>The committee review the current subject guide and clarify which elements members would use as reference material: <a href="https://www.rcn.org.uk/library/Subject-Guides/defence-nursing-services">https://www.rcn.org.uk/library/Subject-Guides/defence-nursing-services</a></p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FM /RC</b> to lead.</li> <li>• <b>DTM</b> - is there any data on how many people access the page.</li> <li>• <b>ALL</b> - List relevant books that will be useful to new defence nursing students</li> </ul>  |
| 7. | <p><b>Representation</b></p> <p>DA gave a brief overview of the RCN representation process.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>RCN Representation<br/>Member Feedback Fo</p> </div>   |
| 8. | <p><b>Forum Work Plan &amp; Strategic Objectives (2027)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Webinar series – getting the comms out there – set up a comms plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Minimum four a year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nurse prescribing in Defence (NG) Wednesday afternoons</li> <li>▪ Integration of nurses from a health care perspective</li> <li>▪ Psychological safety and leadership</li> <li>▪ Quality of clinical placements</li> <li>▪ Palliative care and moral injury in conflict (<b>RC</b>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite Emily Mayhew</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Sexual violence in conflict/Operational Nursing Ethics (<b>ST</b>)</li> <li>▪ Advanced Practice</li> <li>▪ Leadership – document release</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Wednesday afternoons aligned with Defence training windows possible day for webinars.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Conferences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Acute Care symposium in July, put out comms to get attendance from the military (<b>RC</b>)</li> <li>○ Critical Care Flight Nurse</li> <li>○ International Nurses Conference – March</li> <li>○ Defence Nursing Conference 2028 (<b>RC/MC</b>) – <b>DA</b> to link committee with RCN Events team. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collaborate with the Defence CNO.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

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|     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Emily McWhirter would like to link with the DNF and invite them to the next Mentorship Conference in September.</li> </ul> <p>➤ Explore feasibility of an RCN Defence Nursing Conference:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Potentially aligned with RCN events or Defence-led. Linked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Defence Nursing Strategy rollout</li> <li>▪ Pay reform outcomes</li> <li>▪ NATO and international nursing collaboration</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ALL</b> - Committee to forward any updated bios to DA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve targeted engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Direct communication with unit warrants / leaders</li> <li>○ Webinars embedded into Defence training cycles</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reduce reliance on generic social media</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| 9.  | <p><b>Recruitment &amp; Succession Planning/Agree Committee Meeting Dates</b></p> <p>Set 2027 strategy date and committee teams meeting dates – to be agreed at monthly teleconference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair’s term ending (end of 2026)</li> <li>• Several committee roles nearing end of terms (2027)</li> </ul> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <p>Early identification of future Chair / Vice Chair (<b>ALL</b>)<br/> Encourage applications from all Services (<b>ALL</b>)<br/> Maintain continuity and diversity within committee (<b>ALL</b>)</p>  |
| 10. | <p><b>Discussion with CNO Defence - Colonel Margaret (Maggie) Hodge</b></p> <p>Colonel Hodge provided a brief overview of her career progression to her current role as CNO and outlined how she is continuing to deliver her predecessor’s strategy. She also noted that the i-Defence Nursing Tool is currently in beta testing to identify gaps.</p> <p>Key messages shared by CNO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defence Nursing Framework roll-out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New graduates to move directly onto framework from Sept 2026</li> <li>○ “DONC” to be retired</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Framework principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Operationally focused</li> <li>○ Domain-relevant</li> <li>○ Adds value</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ongoing work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Integration with NMC, RCN, NHS England</li> <li>○ Workforce planning alignment</li> <li>○ Credentialing in conflict and NATO contexts</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Pay reform: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Positive indicators, but messaging embargoed until confirmed</li> <li>○ Clear communication plan required once released</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

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|     | CNO Strongly supportive; welcomed collaboration on resources, webinars, and engagement. |
| 11. | <b>AOB</b><br>16 <sup>th</sup> April 10:00-11:00 team meeting.                          |
| 12. | <b>Close</b>  |