

RCN Learning Disability Nursing Forum Annual Report 2025

Introduction:

The purpose of the learning disability nursing forum is to promote and support Registered Nurses and nursing support workers providing care and support for children, adults and older people wherever they practice. The Learning Disability Nursing family and other registered nurses work to improve the health and well-being and the lives and social inclusion of children, adults and older people with learning disabilities wherever they may reside. All have key roles in providing assessment, treatment, care, support and education for people with learning disabilities across the lifespan and supporting other professionals to deliver safe and effective person-centred care across care settings. The purpose of the Learning Disability Nursing Forum is to shape and influence national and local policies, practice and education to improve the lives in the health of children, adults and older people with learning disabilities and promote and enable access to all areas of education, health and social care.

Membership of the forum:

- Our Forum now has 4,629 members at the time of writing this report, an increase of 305 members from last year. Our Forum has continued to hold engagement sessions with members across 2025 and promoted the Forum at these events. It would be fantastic to reach 5000 members over the next twelve months! Of these members, 3,124 members have chosen our Forum as their 'first choice'. We are committed to fostering a diverse membership that reflects communities across the UK and to providing an inclusive space where every member feels valued and respected.
- Committee membership – we had three vacancies this year (for terms starting 1st January 2026) and received 12 applications in total. We were heartened to see so many high-quality applications for the positions. After some incredibly difficult decisions to make, we have been successful in appointing to all three vacancies and look forward to working with our new committee members in the New Year. Details of our Committee members can be found on the website <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Get-Involved/Forums/Learning-Disability-Nursing-Forum/Meet-the-Team>
- Our Forum Facebook page has 2,300 members, a small increase of 100 members since last year. Again, promotion of the page and increased use of social media by our committee members may have been instrumental in raising the profile of this page.
- Since the decision was made to stop using X (formerly Twitter) at the end of November 2024, we have opened a Blue Sky account for our Forum - @rcnldnursing.bsky.social Our account currently has 122 followers and 137 following.

Reflections on 2025 (Outputs and outcomes)

1. Learning Disability Nursing review:

As part of an outcome from the workforce summit held at the end of 2024, a learning disability nursing review is currently being undertaken, with a survey being shared widely across the UK, encouraging completion by as many learning disability nurses as possible. This survey is due to close at the end of November 2025, with a review aiming to publish by the end of March 2026.

The Forum have been heavily supporting this review and it is likely that the review findings will shape the work of our Forum moving forward into 2026 and beyond.

2. Member engagement events:

During 2025, our Forum have supported the RCN Learning Disability Nursing review and have held five online workshops to debate the current issues and challenges. Attendance across these workshops have totalled around 300 people including nurses in the NHS, social care, student nurses, nurse academics and lived experience representatives. Focus on topical issues including workforce planning, role / identity of learning disability nursing and the role of learning disability nurses in social care.

3. Supporting autistic people in your nursing setting webinar:

Further to the publication of the autism position statement in November 2024, a webinar was held with RCN members in July, facilitated by our committee member and professional lead. The event was attended by over 100 people and received positive feedback from attendees. The impact of the webinar raised awareness of the needs of autistic people and how small changes in practice can make a big difference to someone's care experience. Speakers with lived experience of autism kindly shared their experiences which made the session even more powerful.

4. RCNi Nursing Careers & Jobs Fair Manchester - Meeting the needs of Autistic People in Mental Health Services:

Our committee member delivered a presentation to around 200 people at the above event in Manchester in September. Raising awareness of the needs of autistic people and how mental health services can meet their needs more effectively was shared. It also highlighted the transferable skills we possess as learning disability nurses in supporting our wider mainstream health colleagues.

5. Out of the Shadows: Learning Disability Nursing in social care:

This webinar highlighted the significant contribution / value that learning disability nurses bring to people with learning disabilities in social care settings. Best practice was shared by a wealth of experienced nurses / nurse leaders in this field.

6. Congress 2025:

Our Forum was successful in getting a congress item on the agenda in May 2025, which focussed on the urgent need for workforce modelling that recognises the importance that learning disability nursing has across all care settings. This item was passed unanimously, and RCN Council has committed to ensuring further work is undertaken to look at this.

Our Forum has 4 voting places at RCN Congress, and we would encourage forum members to apply for a place to vote on behalf of our Forum at this annual event. It is a great opportunity to become more involved and network with nurses / support workers from across the UK.

Our Forum also held two Education, Learning & Development events at Congress. The first event was entitled 'Right to Good health'. This event was co-facilitated by Forum Committee members and people with lived experience of autism and learning disabilities. The event aimed to raise awareness of the health needs of people with learning disabilities and how making reasonable adjustments can make a big difference to health outcomes for people.

The second event focussed on the new resource 'Learning Disability Pain Assessment Toolkit' developed in collaboration with the RCN Pain and Palliative Care Forum. This project is now complete and we are awaiting a publication date.

7. Learning & Intellectual Disability Nurses Alliance (LIDNIA)

Following on from the RCN Learning Disability Nursing workforce summit held at the end of November 2024 in London at RCN HQ, a collaboration between the UK Consultant Learning Disability Nurses Network & Learning & Intellectual Disability Nurses Academic Network has been formed to become a nursing 'alliance'. The same issues / themes facing learning disability nursing are discussed across each of these forums and the newly formed alliance is an attempt to bring together the knowledge, skills and experience from these forums to influence key stakeholders in relation to our profession.

RCN Representations:

8. National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcomes and Death (NCEPOD) – Learning Disability study:

Our committee have continued to support the work of NCEPOD with the distribution of surveys to carer networks / clinicians earlier in 2025, with a recent meeting to hear preliminary results from these surveys. The report is likely to be published in 2026, with positive practice in acute care settings being highlighted.

9. Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Autism Inpatient Model of Care Delivery Group:

Our committee attends the above delivery group meetings which is focussed on informing / supporting a revised model of care for Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Autism Inpatient services. Representation at these meetings ensures that the role / profile of learning disability nursing is highlighted as part of the strategy development.

10. Restrictive Practice Oversight Group:

Our committee attends the above meetings to ensure that the role that learning disability nurses have in relation to least restrictive practice is included and that best practice can be disseminated to our members. The RCN are looking at whether a position statement regarding restrictive practices needs to be developed, to support nursing staff.

11. Pegasus – emergency planning for a future pandemic:

Our committee member had the unique opportunity to represent learning disability nursing at a Department of Health and Social Care emergency planning event in September. They were able to offer learning disability nursing advice / expertise to ensure that future plans took account of the needs of people with learning disabilities in the event of a future pandemic. The role / profile of learning disability nurse was also highlighted in terms of the skills / knowledge we bring.

12. Cross Forum Conference planning:

Our committee have been collaborating with other RCN Forums to develop a conference for nurses that aims to both raise the profile of our wonderful profession and showcase some of the incredible work we do. Watch this space for 2026! There will no doubt be a call for poster abstracts / presentations.

13. Eyes Right – RCN Ophthalmic Forum collaboration:

Our committee is assisting the ophthalmic forum with updating their clinical pages, to ensure the needs of patients with learning disabilities are identified and understood, to improve care experience and outcomes when accessing eye care. A Forum member is helping with this work as she has a special interest in this area. Our committee acknowledge that we do not always have the necessary skills / knowledge which is why we will always seek support from our wider forum membership to get the expertise we need.

Plans for 2026:

Unfortunately, learning disability nursing remains in 'crisis' as a workforce in decline. Further work is taking place, supported by the RCN, with a report due to be published at the end of March 2026.

The Forum Committee are holding their strategy day on 9th December to plan work for 2026, which will undoubtedly continue to focus on the significant challenges our profession is facing, but will also continue to celebrate and share the very best our profession has to offer.

As always, we are keen to hear what our Forum members feel is important for us to focus on too and we are always happy to hear your thoughts, ideas and suggestions.

Katy Welsh – RCN Learning Disability Nursing Forum Chair and Jonathan Beebee - Professional Lead

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