



Royal College
of Nursing

RCN Nursing Workforce Standards

Briefing for RCN Reps and
Branch Executives



Introduction

In May 2021 the RCN published its **Nursing Workforce Standards**.

There are 14 standards that are grouped into three key themes:

- responsibility and accountability
- clinical leadership and safety
- health, safety and wellbeing.

As a Royal College and professional membership body, we have used our credibility and clinical expertise to set out what we see as the expected standards related to the provision of safe and effective nursing care.

The *Nursing Workforce Standards* are designed to be used alongside other existing legislative and regulatory instruments such as national staffing legislation (where it exists) and the NMC Code of professional practice.

It is essential to use the professional position and regulations to prevent the erosion of nursing care, and to protect our members.

Using the Standards in my role as a rep or branch executive

We have been exploring the Standards with a group of reps and branch executives and considering how you might use them and the value they bring.

The overwhelming feeling is that while these Standards feel fresh and new, they don't demand more of you in your role. **What they do really well is articulate the link between working conditions and patient care** in a way that will help people understand trade union activity in a professional context.

They can be used by reps to support and represent individual members but also to work collectively to question and influence for change either through branch activity or partnership working with unions and senior management.

Supporting individual members

The *Nursing Workforce Standards* provide an evidence base and language to support members to articulate why they deserve better working conditions, whether that be about their development, their health and safety or their contracted terms and conditions.

Often when supporting and representing members, we see that individuals are seen as failing or to blame when it's actually system-wide issues that are playing out. The Standards help to move the conversation from "who went wrong and how can we blame them" to "what went wrong and how we can fix it". This means they can be a powerful tool when reflecting on incidents or writing statements and can provide courage when members are wanting to speak up and raise concerns.

Working collectively to improve workplace standards

Reps and branch executives work proactively with members, other trade unions and senior managers to highlight and address system-wide issues.

Using the Nursing Workforce Standards to organise for change

The *Nursing Workforce Standards* set out what high quality nursing care looks like. We can use them to start a conversation with branch members about what we experience in the workplace, what's good and what needs to change.

Partnership working with recognised unions and senior management

Working together with other recognised unions is key to reps building collective power in their workplace. This can be through formal structures such as staff side where such arrangements are in place, or other staff representative forums.

RCN reps are experienced in partnership working with many holding positions on staff forums. What the Standards now offer is a better way to articulate the link between workplace conditions and quality care and a framework to assess the performance of an organisation and to identify areas of concern or opportunities for improvement. Reps can use the new edition of **Ask. Listen. Act**, which has been aligned to the Standards, as well as the **Working Together: Being Active on Staff Side** resource to support them in their work with colleagues in other unions.

Working proactively with senior management and nursing leads is key to the early identification of potential issues and the development of potential solutions. Using the Standards, we can support nursing leaders to build the case around system challenges impacting on nursing practice and the provision of safe and effective care. Two Standards Checklists on Clinical Leadership & Safety and Health, Safety & Wellbeing have been developed for use by members. The Standards Checklists can be used as benchmark tools leading to the development of workplace improvements. Individuals can become Standards Champions on completion of their improvement work. **More information is available here.**

Useful resources for reps and branch execs

Website: There is an **area of the main RCN website** which introduces and explores the *Nursing Workforce Standards* and has information, FAQs and resources. You are also able to print off the full set of Standards.

Raising awareness locally: We are in contact with senior nurse leaders across the four countries about the *Nursing Workforce Standards* and we would encourage you to work closely with your RCN Officer to ensure you agree a 'joined-up' approach across the three identified groups of members, other trade unions and senior management.

Resource for reps and branch executives: During our work exploring the *Nursing Workforce Standards* we agreed that, rather than a new resource, we would look at our existing resources and see how the Standards can be applied. This resulted in the launch of a new version of *Ask. Listen. Act* which used the Standards as the framework for questioning and influencing activity. This has been produced as a printed publication that is available to all reps and branch executives.