

RCN NETWORKING

GUIDELINES FOR RCN BOARDS

**This guidance is for the development of opportunities
for professional and trade union networking**

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Approved by Council March 2013

1. Purpose

This guidance provides a framework for the development of local professional and trade union networking, within the overall governance arrangements for RCN Boards. A checklist on how to set a network up is attached as an appendix.

Guidance for UK-wide networks is also being developed.

2. Context and background

Council

RCN Council is the governing body of the RCN and sets strategic direction and priorities of the organisation. Council operates a scheme of delegation. It delegates authority for specific areas of activity to the Council committees and to boards. Council committees have responsibility for practice and policy development and for identifying and deciding how the strategic priorities of the organisation are met. They are overview and scrutiny committees with a commissioning and assurance role. They set up task and finish groups to carry out priority work which are made up of representatives from the parts of the membership with an interest in the particular issues.

The Council's Nursing Policy and Practice Committee (NPPC) and Membership Representation Committee (MRC) will ask boards to input into the development of UK policy and practice. Boards will do this by involving members and local networks. It is through this process that members' expertise and knowledge will be used to inform UK policy and practice formulation and implementation.

Boards

RCN country and regional boards are responsible for the governance in their country or region in line with RCN strategy and policy and are accountable for ensuring that the priorities set and decisions taken by Council are implemented. Boards are accountable to members for having effective communication and consultation mechanisms in place which will enable them to seek the views of members, branches and local networks and representative groupings¹ and ensure they are taken into account in local decision making and are communicated to Council. Boards are the key conduit for the majority of RCN members to influence action taken on country/regional issues and decisions made by Council. Boards will work best when they communicate well with members. This may be through local professional and trade union networks which will take a variety of forms and will be underpinned by the following principles to:

¹ Representative groupings include: stewards; health and safety representatives; learning representatives; professional networks; etc

- support the board to make timely and well informed decision making
- deliver effective communication between boards, member networks, accredited representative groups and forums
- deliver effective communication between boards and member networks, forums and groups
- ensure the views of branches and accredited representatives inform the work of the board
- ensure the views and interests of members representing professional issues are taken into account by boards
- put in place a transparent process by which all members, accredited representative groups, networks and forums can influence and inform the board agenda
- support collaborative working across countries and regions where there are common professional and trade union issues to be considered

RCN UK forums

Forums are groups of RCN members working in a similar nursing specialty or with like interests. Thousands of RCN members throughout the UK use forums to connect with each other, share ideas, influence policy and achieve real change/improve patient care. They are able to enhance their practice knowledge and skills and be part of a team that identifies, promotes and develops future nurse leaders in their chosen field.

Full information on RCN forums is available on the Forums page of the RCN website at http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/rcn_forums

One of the biggest challenges of this work is to build strong working links at country and regional level with our active forum members to ensure they contribute to local policy and practice formulation and delivery by taking part in networking opportunities or joining subject specific task and finish groups.

RCN UK representatives' groups

Trade union representatives are elected members of the RCN who act as the link and conduit of information between members, the UK national reps committees and RCN Council. The representative role is clearly defined within employment legislation and this gives certain rights, such as time off to carry out duties of the role. There are three types of trade union representatives:

- Stewards
- Safety representatives
- Learning representatives

Stewards support and represent members in the workplace. Their role is to promote workplace employment rights and ensure that members are treated fairly.

Safety representatives represent the health and safety interests of members at work and work with employers to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for RCN members.

Learning reps support the learning and career development of RCN members in the workplace through enabling members to meet continuing professional development requirements for safe and effective practice. Many of our forum members are also learning reps.

Our UK representatives' committees help us to ensure that the views and concerns of our accredited representatives inform our policy and practice at UK level. These committees report into the Membership and Representation Committee (MRC) through a Trade Union Governance Group which ensures that MRC receives a single message from all our stewards, health & safety representatives and learning representatives about their priorities and concerns.

These committees need to be informed by the views of our representatives on the ground and this will happen in future through our local trade union networks. They will also support the board's work to implement UK practice and policy locally.

3. The guidelines

RCN Local member networking opportunities

Local member networks are different from the UK wide forums and UK representatives committees. Local networks consist of RCN members from the relevant country or region working in a similar nursing speciality who, at a local level, share ideas and work to improve practice or RCN accredited stewards, health and safety representatives and learning representatives who at a local level share information, experience and ideas and work to support members on the ground to improve the ways in which representatives can make a difference to members' working lives and employment experience and inform board and UK policy and practice.

All RCN local professional network members must be a member of any associated RCN UK forum or an accredited representative.

Accountability and governance

The RCN board is responsible and accountable for the delivery and performance monitoring of local professional and trade union networking activity.

The RCN board must approve all networks.

The RCN board will receive reports from each network on a regular basis.

The RCN board requires all standing networks to have the following:

1. a lead member for liaison, communication and organisational purposes. In the case of the trade union networks it will normally be the member representing the country or region on the UK committee
2. a staff contact from the regional or country office to provide assistance and support

3. an activity plan which is approved by the board and forms part of the country and regional operational plan which it monitors on a quarterly basis. Any funding is approved by the board as part of the planning and budgeting process. Local network activity should demonstrate that it aligns with/compliments the relevant UK forum or representative committees' priorities.
4. any funding requirements will be approved by the board and managed through the country or regional office.

Setting up a RCN local networking opportunity

Members must seek formal approval for establishing a new network from their country or regional board. Networks will be formed by and accountable to the board.

The purpose of a local network is:

- to enable RCN members to network locally with other members
- to feedback to the board
- to enable network members to link with and help shape the professional and trade union agendas of the RCN nationally
- to enable network members to contribute towards the professional and trade union agendas of the country or regional board
- to enable the RCN country or regional board to generate responses from local RCN members when expertise or member opinion is needed.

Role descriptors

(i) Role of the network lead (member)

1. to liaise with the identified RCN staff link for the network
2. to organise the network and coordinate and deliver its activity plan and coordinate the network's priorities for inclusion in the board operational plan and budget
3. to collaborate with the local country or regional communications department of the board to lobby on identified issues affecting the interests of nurses, in line with RCN policy
4. to promote the work of the professional or trade union network, ensuring there are appropriate links with the country or regional RCN board, branches, other forums and networks

5. to communicate with network members
6. to ensure that the composition of the network reflects the breadth of nursing within the area of practice and actively seek and recruit members in areas that are not currently represented
7. to link with the associated UK forum or representatives committee and ensure strong two-way communication is in place
8. to be accountable to the RCN in accordance with the network guidelines and RCN governance requirements

(ii) Role of the RCN staff link

Each network will be linked to a named local country or regional RCN staff member. The staff link will:

- support the network lead to submit annual activity plan and any budget requirements. Ensure the RCN local professional network is aware of the importance of linking with the corresponding UK professional forum or the relevant UK representatives committee.
- ensure the network complies with RCN UK governance and diversity and equality requirements

Communications

All communications to the full list of network members, for example distribution of fliers, must go through the appropriate country or regional board administrative processes to ensure RCN compliance with legal requirements on data protection and organisational policy on bulk emails. Networks cannot keep distribution lists of RCN members, outside the RCN.

Media and political influencing work

The RCN works at UK, country and regional level to:

- support and advance members' interests
- raise awareness of nursing's vital and unique contribution to patient care
- promote solutions that will strengthen and improve health services.

It has an active and extensive media and political programme designed to secure the support and understanding of opinion formers and the public. Network members can make an important contribution to this work. It is important to ensure that media and influencing work is undertaken in a co-ordinated and consistent way to maximise the impact of the RCN. Network members should therefore approach their country or regional office for advice and agreement before making contact with local media or local politicians and opinion formers. They will be able to advise on

- forthcoming parliamentary enquiries or recent debates that may be of relevance to a professional network and will know whether the RCN has had recent contact with a particular parliamentarian or has meetings set up
- recent and forthcoming print and broadcast interviews involving the RCN and can provide support and training where appropriate.

Network members should always contact their country or regional office if they are approached directly by the media and should take advice.

Event organisation

The professional or trade union network should discuss any conferences/events they would like to hold with the relevant country or regional member of staff and how this could be supported and funded.

Planning any event is important and therefore time is of the essence. The earlier that an event can be organised the better the likelihood of high interest and high attendance. A successful conference can take at least **six months** to plan; therefore it is important to give adequate thought to the time frame. Workshops and seminars can be planned in less than six months but to secure a high attendance the audience should be targeted at **least** six weeks in advance, so planning should begin at least **three months** prior to the event.

The network needs to consider the following issues:

- the purpose and theme of the event
- the programme identifying topics and potential speakers
- learning outcomes for the proposed event
- means of marketing the proposed event and expected number of delegates
- cost and funding, e.g. delegate fees, speaker fees, cost of venue, catering, hiring of equipment
- venue and catering
- date and time
- equipment
- speakers requirements.

It is essential for a member of the RCN country or regional staff team to be invited to a network meeting to discuss any proposed event at the initial discussion and planning stage. The administrative team will advise and guide the network on organising their events.

Funding

It will be for the country or regional board to decide whether proposed network activity/events can be funded. Network members should in the first instance discuss with the relevant country or regional member of staff how any proposed activities/events could be supported and funded.

Conflict of interest

The network should ensure there is no conflict of interest whenever network expenditure is involved. The RCN's Conflict of Interest Policy is on the RCN website www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/regulations . A typical example of a conflict of interest is to pay for the holding of a network meeting or other function in a hotel or other venue which is owned by a network member, or their family, relatives or friends, another RCN member or other persons with whom network officers have a special relationship or vested interest. If there is any financial benefit or other from so doing, this should be declared to the other officers and the regional/country office beforehand.

Resignation

If a network lead stands down or resigns the position, there are various tasks to be completed, which apply to both the incoming and outgoing network lead:

- a. all network leads have a duty to brief the new lead fully about the network financial position.
- b. the RCN country or regional board must be informed of the change, giving details of the name, membership number and address of the new lead.

Dissolving a professional or trade union network

If a network decides that it is no longer needed, the network lead should formally inform the country or regional board and the staff link for the network.

END

Appendix

Checklist for use when developing a local network

1. Is the purpose to enable members locally to network?
2. Have you clarified the purpose and scope of the network?
3. Have you identified the members who will be part of your network?
4. Have you identified a member network lead?
5. Have you communicated with a member of staff as a link person?
6. Have you discussed how your network will work with your link member of staff?
7. Have you developed a network proposal for the Board?
8. Has your network being approved by your regional or country Board?
9. Have you developed a network activity plan and method of reporting in discussion with your link member of staff and members?