Wear the badge on the outside.
Feel the pride on the inside.

THE RCN REPRESENTATIVES
JOINT HANDBOOK
Proud to help you make a difference
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Dear colleagues,

Thank you for your continued dedication as an RCN representative; the excellent work you do is greatly valued. We know that you sacrifice your time and energy to aid colleagues.

And to those of you new to the role, you have joined a community of representatives proud to make a difference to their workplaces and the RCN.

You all make a great impact on the working lives of more than 415,000 members; safeguarding their welfare and providing them with opportunities to develop themselves and their careers.

The RCN simply could not function without its representatives and each of you is integral to the work that we do as the largest professional nursing organisation in the world. In return we want to offer you the support and resources you need to do the best job you can. Please take advantage of all we have to offer you and your development.

We appreciate that every one of you has been willing to put RCN members first at a time when many feel undervalued or sidelined. You are an inspiration to us all.

Please keep up the good work. Together we can continue to be a voice for members, a voice for nursing, a voice for health care.

Dr Peter Carter OBE
RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary

This handbook will give you an overview of what information, advice and support is available to RCN representatives and where to find out more. It provides a foundation of information to underpin your representative role whether you are a learning representative, safety representative or steward.

You will also receive a handbook for your specific role. This will give you additional information tailored to the work you do for the RCN.
SECTION 1: WORK WITHIN THE PARAMETERS OF YOUR REPRESENTATIVE ROLE

Statement of expectations: support for representatives

The RCN representatives statement of expectations outlines the RCN’s commitment to you once you are elected and accredited as a rep. It will support you in the development of your role and practice and it is for both experienced RCN reps and those who are newly accredited.

How do RCN reps make a difference?

Learning representatives

Learning reps support our members by promoting learning and career development in the workplace. Workplace learning is important in raising and maintaining standards and promoting patient safety. There is evidence that when staff receive good quality appraisals, skills development and access to learning and are properly equipped to undertake their job, there is a positive impact on patient experience and the quality and safety of care.

Learning representatives have access to the RCN’s resources to support nursing practice and share that information in the workplace to support staff to deliver safe, effective, quality care. They work in partnership with stewards to spot trends in case-work caused by capability issues, for example, drug errors, and then work with individuals and workplaces to find learning solutions.

You can find the learning representative role descriptor on the RCN website:
www.rcn.org.uk/activist

Safety representatives

Safety reps help to ensure our members operate within a healthy and safe working environment. Working in partnership with employers, they safeguard the health and welfare of all members.

There is evidence that unhealthy environments affect nurses’ physical and psychological health through the stress of heavy workloads, long hours, low professional status and difficult relations in the workplace. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recognises the vital contribution health and safety representatives and trade unions make to maintaining and improving health and safety in the workplace.

Safety representatives play an important part in improving working conditions and as a result the quality of patient care. They also have additional legal rights where they can ask for and receive information related to incidents, sickness absence and the use of bank and agency staff. These early warning signs assist the safety representative and the RCN in spotting trends in organisations and raise concerns.

You can find the safety representative role descriptor on the RCN website:
www.rcn.org.uk/activist

Stewards

Stewards protect the rights of our members, ensuring fair treatment on all employment matters. Working in partnership with employers, they represent members both individually and collectively. Stewards know that workplaces that have good employment practices and value their staff have better patient outcomes.

Stewards also work in partnership with other trade unions to promote positive working relationships. Together with other unions they negotiate for fair terms and conditions and employment policies and practices that value the work and performance of staff. Stewards are able to articulate the impact of workforce changes on patient care and successfully combine both trade union and professional issues in their work with employers.

You can find the stewards representative role descriptor on the RCN website:
www.rcn.org.uk/activist

Trade union recognition

A trade union is said to be recognised when an employer agrees to negotiate with it over employment terms and conditions on behalf of a particular group of workers. Once a union becomes recognised the employer must comply with certain legal duties.

Recognition is therefore an employer’s formal agreement to work with the RCN to achieve mutual objectives for its business and employees. An agreement provides the framework for how joint relations will be conducted.

Practice standards

The RCN practice standards describe the role of an RCN representative. Each one of the 12 practice standards has a related learning outcome, which describes the learning you need to achieve during your journey from newly accredited to fully practising RCN representative.

As reps progress through the pathway they will be supported to evidence that they meet the assessment criteria which flow from the practice standards.

www.rcn.org.uk/activist
Trade union representatives

Union representatives (reps) have many rights that are protected in law. For example, reps have the right to undertake learning and development and reasonable time off to carry out their duties.

They take on many different responsibilities, ranging from individual member cases to regular meetings with management as well as keeping in touch with colleagues from the RCN and other unions. Union representatives and employers should work together to arrange appropriate time off and make arrangements for cover while representatives are undertaking union duties or activities.

Facility time and facilities agreements

Trade union recognition allows reasonable paid time off and facilities to undertake union duties and attend RCN training. The amount of time granted varies between organisations, and time is usually granted collectively for all notified representatives across the different recognised unions.

Facilities agreements are often part of a union’s collective agreement with the employer. The agreement covers all the union’s industrial relations with the employer, including recognition and negotiation.

Facilities agreements cover time off as well as other aspects of the RCN’s rights to represent its members. For example, the agreements allow access to information and physical resources such as rooms and means of communication.

The RCN publication Making the case for facilities agreements and facility time sets out the benefits of union representatives. It restates what the law and good practice say about facilities agreements and facility time. It also lists the duties for which stewards, safety representatives and learning representatives are entitled to paid time off.

You can find Making the case for facilities agreements and facility time on the RCN website:
www.rcn.org.uk/a/543425

ACAS Code of Practice

Section three of the 2010 Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) Code of Practice - time off for trade union duties and activities provides the definitive statements concerning time off for union representatives in their collective bargaining, union learning, TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) and collective redundancy roles.

You can find the code and a range of other useful information available on the ACAS website:

The ACAS Code of Practice is similar to the content of the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) publication of the same name for members in Northern Ireland. You can find this on the LRA website:
www.lra.org.uk

Further advice and guidance on time off provisions for safety representatives is provided by the Health and Safety Executive in their Approved Code of Practice Consulting workers on health and safety. You can find this on the HSE website:
www.hse.gov.uk

In Scotland, pre-existing arrangements known as PIN (partnership information network) guidelines add a further layer of support for trade unions.
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/12/06131150/0

What should I do if my request for time off is refused?

Although employers must grant reasonable time off to representatives of recognised trade unions to carry out their duties, there is an element of discretion over what may be regarded as reasonable. If you are refused a time off request that you consider reasonable, put the case in writing to the manager. Refer to the law, ACAS or LRA codes of practice and local agreements, and set out why you believe it should be granted.

If time off is still refused, you should:
- ask the manager concerned to put the reasons in writing
- contact your RCN officer/mentor.

Expenses

The RCN’s expenses policy and claim forms are available on the RCN website. The policy includes specific reference to accredited representatives and arrangements for claiming expenses incurred as part of your specific representation duties and the costs relating to non-representation duties as a member.

RCN representatives and RCN members cannot claim for attending branch meetings. You can find more information on the website:
www.rcn.org.uk/a/531524
SECTION 2: PROMOTE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND FAIR TREATMENT FOR ALL RCN MEMBERS

Dignity Charter

Dignity has been a core theme for the RCN for some time, both in nursing practice and, importantly, within the RCN itself. Members and staff expect to be treated with dignity and respect as well as care and consideration. This expectation is at the heart of the RCN’s Dignity Charter.

The charter sets out the rights and responsibilities of all RCN members in relation to their interaction with each other and with RCN staff. It also includes some specific rights and responsibilities for RCN representatives.

Failure to respect the charter may lead to sanctions under the RCN disciplinary policy.

The Dignity Charter is under review, you can find the latest version on the RCN website.


www.rcn.org.uk/publications

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 (EA10) applies in England, Scotland and Wales and provides legal protection from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It replaces previous anti-discrimination laws, makes it easier to understand and strengthens protection in some areas.

The act defines nine protected characteristics and prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of:

- age
- disability
- gender
- gender identity
- race, ethnicity or national origin
- religion, faith or belief
- sexual orientation
- marriage/civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity.

Definitions of discrimination, harassment and victimisation

Direct

Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic they have or are thought to have (see perceptive discrimination below). Or it could be because they associate with someone who has a protected characteristic (see associative discrimination below).

Associative

This is direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.

Perceptive

This is direct discrimination against an individual because others think they possess a particular protected characteristic. It applies even if the person does not actually possess the characteristic.

Indirect

Indirect discrimination can occur when you have a condition, rule, policy or even a practice in your organisation that applies to everyone, but particularly disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic.

Harassment

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Employees can complain of behaviour that they find offensive even if it is not directed at them, and the complainant need not possess the relevant characteristic themselves. Employees are also protected from harassment because of perception and association.

Third party harassment

The Equality Act makes employers potentially liable for harassment of employees by people (third parties) who are not employees, such as customers or clients.

Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when an employee is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act. Or it could be because they are suspected of doing so.

EA10 puts additional requirements on public sector organisations including the NHS. The specific requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) vary between the three countries covered by the act. Overall, the duty requires public sector organisations to advance equality of opportunity, foster good relations and eliminate discrimination, victimisation and harassment.

Equality legislation in each of the four UK countries

England

In England, specific duties require public sector organisations including the NHS to:

- publish information to demonstrate compliance with the PSED at least annually (no later than 31 January each year)
- prepare and publish specific and measurable equality objectives at least every four years (no later than 6 April). Clinical commissioning groups are required to set their equality objectives by 13 October.
NHS organisations are required to produce data on their workforce and set out their equality objectives. It is considered good practice for organisations to carry out and to be informed of the results of an equality impact assessment. This is a risk assessment to ensure that individuals and groups with protected characteristics are not placed at a disadvantage as a result of changes to services or to employment terms and conditions.

The Equality Delivery System (EDS) allows NHS organisations to adopt 18 different outcomes against which they assess and grade their performance around delivering equality. The outcomes are grouped against the following four goals:

- a representative and supported workforce
- inclusive leadership
- better health outcomes
- improved patient access and experience.

All three RCN representative roles should work with their organisation to encourage fair process in accordance with the EDS (if this applies).

You can find more information on the NHS England website:

www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/gov/edc/eds

Scotland

The specific duties in Scotland require public sector organisations including the NHS to:

- report progress on mainstreaming the equality duty
- publish equality outcomes and report progress
- assess and review policies and practices
- gather and use employee information
- publish gender pay gap information
- publish statements on equal pay
- consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement
- publish information in an accessible way
- consider other matters.

The scope of the Scotland-specific duties is wide ranging and includes: accessible publishing; and a requirement to assess and review policies and practices. The time frame for reporting progress is generally two years, and the first formal reports on progress are due by 30 April 2015.

Representatives should work with their organisations to promote equality in line with the specific duties, check progress and challenge lack of progress where applicable.

Wales

The specific duties in Wales cover:

- objectives
- strategic equality plans
- engagement
- assessing impact
- equality information
- employment information
- pay differences
- staff training
- procurement
- annual reporting
- publishing
- Welsh Ministers’ reporting
- review
- accessibility.

The specific duties are fairly detailed. A significant emphasis is placed on the need to carry out impact assessment and engage with groups of interest that includes staff side.

Representatives should work with employers to promote fairness, engage on equalities and challenge lack of progress where applicable.

Detailed guidance on EA10 and the specific public sector duties are available from the Equality and Human Rights Commission website:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/wales

Northern Ireland

Equality legislation in Northern Ireland centres on the following pieces of legislation:

- Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970
- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Race Relations (Northern Ireland) order 1997
- Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988
- Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Equality (Disability, etc) (Northern Ireland)
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 Order 2000
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005
- Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006
- The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.

Northern Ireland legislation deals with specific protected characteristics. The Equality Commission Northern Ireland (ECNI) provides a detailed explanation of how the legislation works in practice. For representatives it is important to recognise that the overwhelming majority of RCN members and other employees will receive a level of protection from discrimination in the workplace as a result of this legislation.

Human Rights Act 1988

The Human Rights Act applies across the UK, and it may provide useful tools for you when you approach the issues of:

- fairness
- equality
- dignity
- autonomy.

For example, ensuring that recruitment and selection processes are fair and free from bias is an important consideration for representatives and this illustrates the need for fairness.

Ensuring that your employer treats its workforce with respect and that all staff, regardless of their grade and tenure, can work in environments that are respectful is likely to reduce stress and absenteeism.

Equality forms the bedrock of why trade unions are necessary and valuable partners in the workplace. Ensuring equality of access and opportunity is vital to delivering equality in the workplace at a practical level.

Recent RCN surveys have highlighted the corrosive and damaging impact of the lack of dignity that results from bullying and harassment in the workplace. Environments that do not promote dignity for staff are perhaps unlikely to deliver this for their patients and may be a symptom of an issue with the wider workplace culture.

In promoting autonomy, the workforce should be empowered to support and include patients in their care.
Questions to ask your employer

What can representatives do?
Representatives working in any aspect of health and social care have a role to work with their employer to promote inclusive and fair working practices. The aim is to increase the diversity and quality of the working lives of the paid and non-paid workforce, and support all staff to better respond to patients’ and communities’ needs.

To achieve this here are some questions you could ask your employer.

• Is the recruitment and selection process fair, inclusive and transparent with diversity considered at all levels?
• Are levels of pay and related terms and conditions fairly determined for all posts? Are staff doing the same work in the same job being remunerated equally?
• Are staff supported, trained, offered personal development through performance appraisal to enable them to practise with confidence and competence to do their work, so that services are commissioned or provided appropriately?
• Are staff free from abuse, harassment, bullying, violence from both patients and their relatives and colleagues, with redress being open and fair to all?
• Are flexible working options made available to all staff, consistent with the needs of patients and the way that people lead their lives?
• Is the workforce supported to remain healthy, with a focus on addressing major health and lifestyle issues that affect individual staff and the wider population?

RCN project Is that discrimination?
Wherever you are based, you and your colleagues should be able to work in environments that are free from unlawful discrimination. Part of your role as a representative may be to ensure that you are aware of the often subtle and covert ways that workplace discrimination disadvantages those who experience it.

The RCN’s three-year project Is that discrimination? aims to raise awareness of workplace discrimination, build the capacity of representatives and work constructively with key employers to change workplace culture.

We’re working with you and in partnership with employers to:
• tackle discrimination in the workplace
• equip RCN members with a better understanding of their employment rights
• improve the support and advice we give to you as an RCN representative to enable you to tackle workplace discrimination skilfully.

Watch our video on YouTube to find out more about the campaign.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rezE-ybWW6c

RCN Diversity Champions

As a representative you may find it useful to sign up or encourage colleagues to be an RCN Diversity Champion. These are members who have made a commitment to valuing diversity and implementing equality of opportunities in the workplace.

The RCN provides a useful guide to what is current in the health and social care sector as it relates to equality, diversity and human rights issues. You can find the information in the diversity toolkit and in regular Diversity Champions’ updates.
SECTION 3: ORGANISE AND ENGAGE MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN RCN STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

RCN structure and governance

The RCN Council has 31 members and is made up of: two members from each country and region; two student members; two health practitioner members; and three ex-officio members, the President, Deputy President, and the Chair of Congress.

Council members are elected by the members in their constituency. The positions of Chair and Vice Chair of Council and the Honorary Treasurer are elected by Council from within their group.

Council is responsible for the overall governance of the RCN. It:

- provides leadership and accountability to members for the performance of the RCN
- sets the strategic direction of the organisation
- ensures that the organisation meets its statutory responsibilities and proper standards of conduct
- ensures that the RCN is delivering its strategic plan, and managing risk and its resources efficiently and effectively.

RCN Council does this by working through its committees, as well as country and regional boards. This process allows Council to:

- make clear, timely, and well-informed decisions that ensure the views of members and the wider interests of the RCN are taken into account
- be responsive to the thoughts and concerns of RCN members
- hold open, two-way discussions with members and all other stakeholders.
Goverance and the trade union role of the RCN: how it works in practice

The information below describes how the RCN’s governance structure helps it to carry out its trade union role.

Council committees

Council committees are responsible for strategic priorities such as policy development in specific areas delegated to them by Council. They are overview and scrutiny committees with a commissioning and assurance role. All UK groups feed in through these committees and have the opportunity to influence the annual priorities and work areas agreed by the committees. Council committees are also responsible for consulting members via country and regional boards and the representative groups on all major policy positions/changes.

Membership and Representation Committee (MRC)

The Membership and Representation Committee (MRC) recommends to Council the priorities for the RCN’s work on: pay; terms and conditions; pensions; improving working conditions; the nursing labour market and workforce planning; representatives; and membership generally. MRC commissions work in these areas and sets up task and finish groups.

Trade Union Governance Group (TUGG)

The Trade Union Governance Group (TUGG) is responsible to MRC for the governance of the UK representative committees. Its key role is to:

• represent the views of RCN representatives to TUGG and MRC, and to advise and recommend RCN responses on: employment relations; health, safety and welfare; and lifelong learning
• contribute to the development of RCN policy on: employment relations; health, safety and welfare; and lifelong learning
• promote the role and value of the accredited representative in the RCN and workplaces.

Committee membership brings many benefits, particularly if you are interested in developing a wider interest in employment relations and want to influence RCN policy in this area. Seats up for election are advertised on the RCN website. You can find out more here: www.rcn.org.uk/elections

More information about RCN governance, the Council and committee structure can be found at: www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus.

Disciplinary policy and procedure

Under the RCN’s Standing Orders, Council may take disciplinary action against any member who is guilty of conduct unbefitting of an RCN member.

The RCN aims to ensure that all members are aware of the standards of conduct and behaviour expected of them. To this end, the RCN has introduced a Dignity Charter which all members should follow at all times, and be aware that serious or repeated breach will be regarded as unbefitting conduct. In addition to this, any other conduct that is in any other way unbefitting of an RCN member will also be regarded as unbefitting conduct.

The RCN’s disciplinary policy and procedure deals with a member’s conduct in the context of their RCN membership. Further information about this, and the latest version of the charter (currently under review), can be found on the RCN website: www.rcn.org.uk/a/408829

RCN branches

Every member is allocated to a branch when they join the RCN. The aim of a branch is to recruit, support, develop and retain members and provide a focus for local RCN activity and visibility. It is through working closely with their county or regional board that branches influence the policy and decisions of the organisation.

It is vital that branches have strong links with RCN representatives in the workplaces, and that reps are involved in branch activity and attend meetings regularly. Branches are the mechanism through which RCN representatives are formally accredited. They play a key role in a branch by providing links to members, as well as potential members.

Complaints about RCN services

The RCN is committed to providing the best services and support to its members. To enable us to do this, members can let us know what works well and what we can improve further through the RCN feedback and complaints process. This is simple and easy to access. You can find full information on the RCN website: www.rcn.org.uk/a/382935
Accreditation and dis-accreditation process for RCN representatives

The RCN has detailed guidance on the process for the accreditation and dis-accreditation of representatives, which you should familiarise yourself with. This forms part of the RCN’s regulations, and you can find the process and procedures documents on the RCN’s website:

www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/regulations
www.rcn.org.uk/a/349335

The RCN branch accredits and dis-acredits representatives.

Accreditation is the process by which members become formally recognised either as an RCN steward, safety or learning representative.

Dis-accreditation is the process by which an accredited representative ceases to be an RCN rep. This may be because the representative resigns from the role or it could be because for some reason their branch is no longer able to confirm them in their role.

Once someone is an accredited RCN representative they will start to engage with the RCN learning and development framework and complete the pathway and become a fully-accredited RCN representative. Then they will be expected to maintain and develop their practice through continuous learning and development with mentorship support.

The annual branch AGM will decide whether or not to ratify a representative’s accreditation. Branches are also able to remove accreditation between AGMs if necessary. A representative who does not wish to continue with their role may simply resign at the AGM or at any other time by writing to the branch.

What happens if I move to a new role with the same employer but covered by a different RCN branch?
You will be asked by your branch and/or country/region/board whether or not you wish to continue as a representative in your new role. If you wish to continue, the region/country/board will write to the new branch confirming your continued accreditation as an RCN representative.

If you want to resign as a rep they will notify your current branch and your employer.

What if I move to a different employer?
If you move to a different employer, and subject to your new employer recognising the RCN, you will be contacted by the RCN country, region or board and asked if you wish to continue in the role of an RCN representative. If not, you should resign and your branch will be notified.

If you wish to remain as an accredited representative in your new organisation, the RCN country/region/board will write to your new branch, and inform your old branch that you are moving. The RCN will also notify your new employer of the change.

If the new organisation you are moving to is in a different RCN country or region your previous country/region/board will write to the new country/region/board notifying them.

RCN forums

What are forums?
Forums are groups of RCN members who work in a particular nursing specialty. There are more than 30 forums covering topics such as cancer, education and women’s health.

As a forum member, you will be part of a community that:
• shares ideas and best practice
• enhances practical knowledge
• shapes the world of nursing practice and policy
• identifies, promotes and develops future nurse leaders.

Forums are run for our members, by our members. They are supported by the RCN’s nursing team, which is made up of nurse advisers, co-ordinators and administrators. They work together to influence, develop and support nursing practice.

Join a forum
Forum membership is encouraged and open to all RCN members. To sign up, you’ll need your RCN membership number and MyRCN password. If you want more information go to the RCN website:

www.rcn.org.uk/forums

Building networks and organising members

Engaging with members and colleagues is fundamental to your role. It is important to find out their views and let them know about RCN activity. This can happen through newsletters, workplace and branch meetings, but it is equally as important to talk informally.

You will need to develop a regular network of communication between yourself and key RCN branch members. This includes: the branch chair; secretary; treasurer; other RCN representatives that regularly attend branch meetings; and RCN professional forums.

Make contact with the UK representative committee members in your region or country. They are keen to communicate with their local representatives, and your RCN office should be able to put you in touch. Other key contacts you might want to connect with include: RCN staff (regional or country director, officers and regional office staff); local HR advisers; managers; and other RCN learning representatives, safety representatives and stewards. It can also be mutually beneficial to work with other unions too. Over time it will help to build up a network of these people and regularly communicate with them.
RCN Congress and Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Congress and the AGM are core events in the RCN’s calendar and all members are encouraged to attend. They are separate events that take place in the same week.

What is RCN Congress?
Congress is where RCN members meet to learn, develop and share nursing practice. It has three key areas:

• business agenda - open to RCN members. It includes debates proposed by RCN members and the report of Council
• events programme - open to all delegates to provide professional learning and development opportunities
• Congress Exhibition - the largest nursing exhibition in the UK and open to all delegates.

What happens in the debates?
Resolutions and matters for discussion are put forward by members for debate. Any member can speak in a debate, and by joining in you can influence the direction of the RCN’s future work.

All branches are represented at Congress by a number of voting members. The three UK representative committees also have voting rights at Congress to ensure that the views of learning, stewards and safety representatives are represented.

All members may vote at the AGM, which is held on the same week as Congress.
You can find out more at:
www.rcn.org.uk/congress
www.rcn.org.uk/agm
SECTION 4: EMPOWER MEMBERS TO ACCESS AND USE INFORMATION AND ADVICE APPROPRIATELY

An important part of your representative role is a good understanding of the wide range of information and RCN resources to support you in your role. For example:

- if you are looking to question or challenge the ways in which things are done or the culture in your workplace, it is important that you draw on evidence to support you.
- as a rep you need to be aware of the sources of information that you are entitled to access so that you can monitor the health of your workplace; look for trends in key measures; use information as evidence to back up your activity and support a stronger workplace culture; and recognise early warning signs that may need to be addressed.

Taking a measure of the health of your workplace can be a very important part of your representative role. There are many potential sources of information that you could draw on that are readily accessible through staff side meetings, in workplace committees or through national reporting mechanisms.

To empower members to use information appropriately, you will need to have a good working knowledge of available resources.

Your information toolkit

Below you will find some key information resources that will support you as an RCN rep. The RCN website provides access to online information through the RCN library and heritage services, and learning resources to support both your own and members’ continuing professional development (CPD) through the RCN’s activist and learning zone web pages. You receive an RCN activists’ diary and a free subscription to the weekly newspaper Nursing Standard. As an RCN rep you will also get information, advice and support from your regional/country team and receive regular e-briefings on national employment/legal issues.

Activate

The RCN provides representatives with Activate, a monthly magazine containing news and information specifically for representatives. If you subscribe to e-Activate, the electronic version of Activate, you will also receive Tools of the Trade, a monthly online resource with details of newly-published reports, guidance and publications relevant to representatives. You can find more information here:

www.rcn.org.uk/activist

RCN website

There is a dedicated resource on the RCN website for representatives. Here you will find: news; membership check; representative stationery; recruitment and retention resources; information about the UK representatives conferences; committee updates; and much more.

www.rcn.org.uk/activist

Labour Research Department (LRD) online

RCN representatives have free access to LRD online publications, the leading research and information service for trade unionists. You will find information on employment law, health and safety rights and a range of other key trade union issues. Access is via the RCN website.

www.rcn.org.uk/activist

Resources for learning representatives

The RCN guide Supporting learners: a quick guide to learning resources for RCN learning representatives helps learning representatives find the key resources and guidance for some of the main areas of support they provide for the RCN.

www.rcn.org.uk/a/512039.pdf

www.rcn.org.uk/publications

Resources for representatives and members

RCN Direct

RCN Direct is the gateway to the RCN and provides comprehensive information and advice on a whole range of issues, including:

- employment
- nursing
- membership
- journal subscriptions.

www.rcn.org.uk DIRECT

RCN online advice A-Z

The RCN online advice A-Z covers over 100 employment and nursing topics and a range of factsheets and guides.

www.rcn.org.uk/advice

RCN Direct contacts:

UK: 0345 772 6100
Overseas: 00 44 20 7647 3456.
Advice: 8.30am - 8.30pm, seven days-a-week, 365 days-a-year.
Membership: 8.30am - 8.30pm, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays).
Advice: rcndadvice@rcn.org.uk
Membership: membership@rcn.org.uk
Update your personal details via www.rcn.org.uk/myrcn

RCN member support services

Member support services (MSS) consists of five services:

1. Careers
2. Counselling
3. Immigration advice
4. Welfare rights and guidance
5. Peer support – a support network for injured, ill and disabled members.

Members can access these services by calling 0345 408 4391. The line is open 9.30am-4.30pm from Monday to Friday. RCN representatives can signpost members who may need support. The member support services pages of the RCN website also contain useful fact sheets on welfare benefits, ill health and sickness absence, money and housing issues.

www.rcn.org.uk/mss

www.rcn.org.uk/mss
RCN Learning Zone
The RCN Learning Zone has bite-sized chunks of learning on clinical and personal skills. It also includes sections for activists on health and safety.
www.rcn.org.uk/learningzone

RCN continuing professional development (CPD) online learning
There is freely available online continuing professional development (CPD) relevant to the whole nursing team. Topics include:
• dignity in health care
• first steps for health care assistants
• how trustworthy is your information?
• making sense of patient safety
• supporting people’s nutritional needs.

RCN library and heritage services
The RCN library and heritage service is home to Europe’s most comprehensive nursing collection.
www.rcn.org.uk/library
The library and heritage services pages on the RCN website give you access to:
• more than 1,000 e-journals
• more than 1,500 e-books
• health care databases for literature searches that include the British Nursing Index and CINAHL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature)
• RCN library catalogue for books, reports and these held by RCN libraries, many of which are available electronically
• RCN archives catalogue for records held in the archives
• a virtual enquiry service for any information queries
• guides, online learning and training sessions about literature searching and getting the most from our information resources.
Postal loans are available for RCN members. There is normally a charge for the cost of postage but this is waived for representatives. However, you will still be responsible for the cost of returning the books. There is also a document photocopy and delivery service from RCN libraries. Books can be obtained from other libraries if you cannot find what you are looking for.

Visit a library
We have four libraries around the UK in:
• London
• Belfast
• Cardiff
• Edinburgh.
Each library has a dedicated team of expert staff available to assist you with all your information needs.
Whether you are looking for a quiet area to study on your own, or an informal meeting place, we have the space, resources and technology to support your learning. Facilities include printing and photocopying services, free wifi and access to PCs.
The RCN Library and Heritage Centre in London also houses the Nursing History Collection, an exclusive members’ area, exhibitions, cafe and shop, as well as hosting a range of events.
**RCN archives**

The RCN’s vast archives include organisational records, personal papers of nurses and the records of other nursing organisations. The collections date back to the 19th century and form a unique record of the nursing profession. Research resources include:

- photographs
- oral history interviews with nurses
- private papers donated by individual nurses
- nursing badges.

The RCN is a founder and partner of UK Centre for the History of Nursing & Midwifery. Based in Manchester, the centre organises conferences, seminars and research projects. It has a comprehensive website:

[www.ukchnm.org](http://www.ukchnm.org)

For further information about the UK Centre for the History of Nursing & Midwifery, email: enquiries@ukchnm.org

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**How to contact RCN library services**

**RCN Library and Heritage Centre**

20 Cavendish Square (Henrietta Place entrance) London W1G 0RN

Tel: 0345 337 3368

[rcn.library@rcn.org.uk](mailto:rcn.library@rcn.org.uk)

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**RCN Northern Ireland Library and Information Zone**

17 Windsor Avenue Belfast BT9 6EE

Tel: 028 9038 4612 / 4613

[library.belfast@rcn.org.uk](mailto:library.belfast@rcn.org.uk)

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**RCN Scotland Learning Hub**

42 South Oswald Road Edinburgh EH9 2HH

Tel: 0131 662 6163 / 6164

[scotland.library@rcn.org.uk](mailto:scotland.library@rcn.org.uk)

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**RCN Wales Library and Information Service**

Ty Maeth

King George V Drive East

Cardiff CF4 4XZ

Tel: 029 2068 0754

[wales.library@rcn.org.uk](mailto:wales.library@rcn.org.uk)

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**Virtual enquiry service**

[www.rcn.org.uk/virtual_enquiry](http://www.rcn.org.uk/virtual_enquiry)

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**Other useful information sources**

**The Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)**

ACAS provides up-to-date information on rights at work, including a range of advisory booklets and fact sheets.

[www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

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**Health and Safety Executive (HSE)**

The HSE is an independent regulator and acts in the public interest to reduce work-related death and serious injury in workplaces. Related guidance and news are available on its website, and there are industry-specific pages including health and social care services.

[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

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**Welfare Reform and Work**

Focusses on welfare reform and work, and provides information and resources to help individuals and organisations understand and implement the changes.

[www.gov.uk/employment-advice](http://www.gov.uk/employment-advice)

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**National Skills Academy for Social Care**

The National Skills Academy for Social Care (NSA) is an employer-led, membership organisation, created by social care employers in to transform the quality of leadership, management, training, development, and commissioning in England.

[www.nssocialcare.co.uk](http://www.nssocialcare.co.uk)

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**National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW)**

The NUHW is a union for all workers in the healthcare sector.

[www.nuwh.org.uk](http://www.nuwh.org.uk)

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**Unionlearn**

Unionlearn is a Trades Union Congress (TUC) website to help unions spread the lifelong learning message. Information includes union learning agreements and lifelong learning. TUC courses are not available to RCN members/representatives because the RCN is not affiliated to the TUC.

[www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk)
SECTION 5: REPRESENT AND NEGOTIATE ON BEHALF OF RCN MEMBERS

Representing the RCN and members

You are essential to the strength and the success of the RCN. The RCN is the voice of nursing in the UK and as its representative you are offering vital support and representation to more than 415,000 nurses, health care assistants and nursing students.

For many members you are the local face of the RCN and the person that they will turn to for:

• immediate advice and support. You are a colleague who has the expertise to advise and take forward workplace issues or who can support learning and development
• representation as an individual or a group. An RCN rep is someone who acts professionally, who can forge partnerships with employers while staying committed to the needs of members and patients
• support with researching a case and /or an issue. RCN representatives are linked into networks and information systems, and who may not know the answer but know where to look for it.

What is representation?

As a learning representative, safety representative or steward you will represent members using your own judgement and expertise. You will listen to the views of members in your workplace. For example, you may make a representation to management on behalf of members.

Stewards will also represent individual members’ views in a formal hearing. Safety and learning representatives make representations to management on behalf of members on health and safety/learning issues.

Examples of representation

• Act as an advocate or adviser on work and learning related matters
• Hold surgeries where members can get advice about their terms and conditions or learning opportunities.
• Meet managers to discuss forthcoming business decisions and explaining implications and considerations for members and nursing.
• Present a case to management when someone is being disciplined.
• Present the views of individuals or groups when services are being relocated.
• Negotiate with management to make adjustments in the workplace when a member has a disability.
• Make sure that fair and ‘due process’ is followed.
• Ask management to amend a policy which is disadvantageous to some members.
• Promote equality and diversity.
• Jointly negotiate employment policies, safety policies or educational facilities in the workplace.
• Support to colleagues.

When do you know you have represented successfully?

• When you change a management decision to the advantage of a member (eg full maternity leave for a member of staff wanting to adopt a child).
• When you support a member to have an agreed period of phased return on full pay.
• When you are asked by management for your views on a situation or issue.
• When you carry out a risk assessment and action is taken, eg security bars are removed from office windows or fire alarm tests and fire drills are re-established.
• When you successfully negotiate a particular policy such as flexible working patterns or access to learning.

RCN representatives

Advocate

RCN representatives speak and act on behalf of members. You know when and how to access information. You also know when to refer members to a more experienced representative or officer if the issue is beyond your current level of expertise.

Campaign

RCN representatives are campaigners. You make national campaigns happen locally, and work with RCN UK-wide and regional/country priorities, as well as picking up on local issues. You campaign to improve local conditions and work with the country/regional office. RCN representatives enable members to get involved in local, regional, national and UK campaigns.

Communicate

RCN representatives are communicators. You listen to members, speak on their behalf, engage in committee work, and present issues to management. You work with local branches to put policy into action, use and share information and link with the media and network with others in relevant organisations.

Influence

RCN representatives are influencers. RCN reps work positively to welcome diversity and promote equality by influencing changes in the workplace. Stewards, safety and learning representatives work together to bring RCN policy into the workplace and are alert to new issues as they emerge.

Negotiate

RCN representatives are negotiators. As an RCN rep you work in partnership with employers to secure time off for union duties and use RCN policy to secure best practice, and help to shape health policy.

Organise

RCN representatives are organisers. You develop the local RCN branch, talk to members, hold meetings and recruit new members. You also keep in touch with local issues and priorities.
SECTION 6: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Workplace culture

Workplace culture will have a significant effect on your representative role. Culture is often described as ‘the way we do things around here’. It is the unwritten side of an organisation. Culture influences how you enjoy work, your work relationships and work processes.

Culture is shaped by government policy, targets, media and public opinion. In the health and social care sectors the cultural picture is further complicated by the many different professional groups, where each has different values and perspectives.

There is significant evidence to suggest that the success of organisational change will be limited if the change fails to consider the cultural context in which it sits. In your experience you will recognise how the following factors are likely to impact adversely on a new initiative:

• a fear of blame - staff are afraid to raise concerns
• fatigue – a battle-weary work force
• lack of communication between different professional groups, managers and each other
• lack of resources - low staffing meaning that staff struggle to get through the day let alone seeing the bigger picture
• lack of recognition or reward for introducing new initiatives
• unable to see the results and benefits of change.

And so on...

Therefore, an important part of your representative role will be to recognise the effects of organisational culture on the workplace and work in partnership with others to influence cultural change that promotes a safer workplace and quality nursing care.

What makes an effective workplace culture?

Workplace culture is about people and how they work together. Positive workplace culture develops a spirit of co-operation, openness and learning that enriches everyone’s working experience. Culture is dynamic and constantly changing. It is the responsibility of management to maintain good working practices. As a representative you will need to persuade and educate, and you can use the following policies and legislation to help you:

• organisational policies and procedures
• organisational mission statements/vision
• human resources policies
• recognition agreement
• facilities agreement
• employment contract
• discrimination legislation
• redundancy
• professional guidance, eg Nursing and Midwifery Council
• credible professional standards such as those produced by the RCN.
Rep representatives play a vital role in identifying workplace issues that can pose a risk to our members’ health, safety, wellbeing or conditions of employment.

Risks arise as a result of many things including cost pressures, short staffing, unsafe working practices, lack of access to training and development, or a culture where blame and bullying is commonplace.

Representatives working as a team are able to identify potential risks to members in a number of ways. Firstly, it is always important to consider if the issue bought to you by an individual member is actually wholly or partly a symptom of a wider collective or organisational issue.

For example, if a nurse makes a medication error it may be wholly or partly as a result of a learning need, or the result of a pressurised work environment and competing demands. It is really important that reps take a team approach to exploring and addressing these issues to avoid further problems in the future.

Working as a team of reps in your patch or workplace enables you to identify where patterns emerge in the issues that you are working in and working practice, you will help to ensure procedures are applied fairly.

The role specific handbooks look in greater detail at how each rep role can influence the management of risk.

**Early warning signs**

As an RCN representative you will sometimes question or challenge the ways in which things are done or the culture in your workplace. When this happens it is important that you draw on evidence to support you in this activity. You need to be aware of the sources of information that you are entitled to access so that you can monitor the health of your workplace. You also need to look for trends in key measures and use information evidence to back up your activity to support stronger workplace culture and recognise early warning signs that may need to be addressed.

Taking a measure of the health of your workplace can be a very important part of your representative role. There are many potential sources of information that you could draw on that are readily accessible through staff side meetings, in workplace committees or through national reporting mechanisms.

**Legal support**

In 2013, 14,000 members received workplace representation from stewards or officers in the workplace. In certain circumstances, however, cases are taken outside the workplace to an employment tribunal, and these cases are managed by the RCN legal team. In 2013 the RCN legal team secured £8,842,479 for members in employment tribunal and personal injury compensation.

If doubts are raised about the clinical practice of registered nurses it can result in a referral to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). The number of referrals made is rising year on year. In 2013 the RCN supported 1,288 members through NMC procedures, and 70% of those members were found to have no case to answer or received no sanctions.

Further advice on when and how representatives should refer to the RCN Legal department is provided in the role specific handbooks for stewards and safety representatives.

**Professional indemnity**

The RCN indemnity scheme provides back-up cover for clinical negligence claims, so that members can be confident that they will never suffer a financial penalty. The cover extends worldwide (except USA and Canada) and is worth up to £3 million for each claim. It means members have peace of mind if they take part in educational placements, voluntary, good Samaritan or charitable nursing work.

For employed members, the cover is not needed for work undertaken as part of their contract of employment because the employer is liable. Changes to the RCN scheme in 2013 made this explicit to avoid employers trying to shift their costs on to the RCN.

Self-employed members are generally covered, but there are some exceptions and exclusions such as aesthetic practice due to the high claims risk and associated high premiums relating to work in this area. Self-employed members should check and take advice if they are uncertain as to whether their work is covered.

[www.rcn.org.uk/indemnity](http://www.rcn.org.uk/indemnity)

**Raising concerns**

Safe, compassionate care is everyone’s business. Raising and responding to concerns is something that we should all be comfortably able to do. But, we know that being able to speak out is not always as easy as it sounds. The RCN website offers guidance and information to help members and representatives raise concerns wherever they work – in the NHS or in the independent sector.

**Whistleblowing**

The RCN whistleblowing initiative is not an alternative to raising issues with your employer. However, if you believe a situation has become urgent we can offer you the support and advice you need. Visit the RCN website to find out more.

[www.rcn.org.uk/raisingconcerns](http://www.rcn.org.uk/raisingconcerns)
Role of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)
Registered nurses have always had a duty to report concerns over care to an appropriate person. In 2009 the NMC published *Raising concerns – guidance for nurses and midwives* (NMC, 2008). The principles of the raising concerns guidance also apply to student nurses and student midwives.

www.nmc-uk.org/Publications/Guidance

The guidance needs to be read in conjunction with the NMC Code: standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives (NMC, 2008). The principles of the raising concerns guidance also apply to student nurses and student midwives.

Role of RCN reps
Most organisations will have a policy for raising concerns, and reps have a role to play in ensuring that any such policy provides sufficient protection for members who find they need to use it. Provided the policy is fit-for-purpose, this should be the first port of call for members who have concerns. Stewards will have a role to play in supporting members through the process. All reps have a role to ensure that members are aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to raising issues and are aware of the support they will receive from the RCN. It is important that where issues have been raised RCN reps ensure that they make their officer aware and seek support through mentorship and supervision.
SECTION 8: DEVELOP AND SUPPORT PARTNERSHIP WORKING BETWEEN THE RCN AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Principles of partnership working

Partnership working in the UK developed as a concept during the early 1990s when trade unions and employers realised that the usual adversarial/confrontational-style industrial relations were not working. Trade unions were facing declining membership and a drop in formal recognition in workplaces, which was reflected in the number of recognition agreements. Partnership agreements embraced trade union recognition rights at the work place but wrapped them up in the concept of partnership working.

Partnership working describes anything that involves a co-operative approach to employment relations.

Partnership and recognition agreements provide written commitment from an organisation to work with representatives of specified unions. The terms of the recognition agreement will usually detail the local arrangement for working between the organisation’s senior management team and representatives from the recognised trade unions.

The agreement will detail what issues will be covered and if the management team will simply consult on these issues or negotiate and consult.

Partnership and the independent sector

If you work in the independent sector your employer may also recognise a number of unions or just the RCN. The structures you have in place will depend on the number of unions, size of employer and what has been agreed between the union(s) and employer. Whether you have a partnership agreement or recognition agreement many of the principles of partnership working still apply, and the RCN strongly advocates that representatives work on developing relationships with management that are built on mutual respect, transparency and a commitment to shared problem-solving.

Partnership committees

While partnership committees often look at a range of issues affecting the terms and conditions of employment, there are specific partnership structures that support partnership approaches to safety (health and safety committees) and learning (learning committees). Whether your organisation has set these separate structures in place may be detailed in your recognition or facilities agreement. However, it is becoming increasingly common for organisations to set out arrangements for partnership work on learning in a separate learning agreement.

Health and safety committees have a statutory basis and employers that recognise a trade union are required to set one up if requested to do so by two or more safety representatives.

Further detail about the workplace structures that support partnership working is available in the role specific handbooks for learning, safety reps and stewards.

While the vast majority of RCN representatives will work in an organisation that recognises the RCN, some reps will come from organisations that have not yet signed a recognition or partnership agreement. This is most common where employers have agreed to work with us only in relation to a specific area of employment, most commonly learning.

It is important to recognise that in the absence of recognition, reps do not have the same legal rights to paid time off to undertake their duties, and there is no requirement for the employer to consult with you or work in partnership. Under these circumstances it is important that we work to establish a formal agreement of some kind to ensure you have the rights and protection afforded under trade union legislation. For learning reps this might be a learning agreement.

Core principles of partnership working

While partnership working comes in many guises there are some core principles that can be described as follows:

- having a formal agreement
- working proactively
- working jointly
- problem-solving
- reducing conflict
- valuing each other
- placing employment relations on the agenda.

The benefits of partnership working

There are a number of key benefits for members and employers from partnership working such as:

- positive message to staff and patients
- better work relations
- better productivity
- joint working
- growing representative network
- staff and members feeling valued and engaged.

It does not mean that you cannot have disagreements with employers, or that RCN representatives have to say ‘yes’ to everything that management proposes.
Working with other unions

Part of your role as an RCN representative will be to work with other unions that are recognised by your employer. This may occur in various situations such as staff side, the meeting together of the elected representatives from unions that take on the role of a staff side committee member. Their purpose is to work in partnership with other unions in representing the views of members, and the unions on a partnership committee with employers.

They meet to discuss issues in the workplace prior to the partnership forum so that they can negotiate collectively and foster positive employment relations. Other areas where unions work in partnership include:

- consultations
- sub-committees from the partnership forum
- job evaluations.

Some partnership committees may also include non-trade union staff representatives, who attend at the invitation of the employer.
SECTION 9: ACT ON BEHALF OF THE RCN TO SUPPORT, INFLUENCE AND PROMOTE ITS POLICIES AND CAMPAIGNS

RCN campaigns

We are consistently trying to improve working conditions for our members, along with promoting patient health and safety, and raising concerns about key health issues. The RCN runs a range of campaigns that promote nursing, champion high quality care, and fight against harmful cuts to health care.

Promoting RCN policy and campaigns in the workplace is an important part of the representative role. Increasing the visibility of a campaign in the workplace not only increases the chances of it meeting its objectives, it also demonstrates to members that we are using their membership fees to fight for improvements to the issues they face every day at work.

Empowering members by involving them in an RCN campaign is a really effective way of demonstrating the value of RCN membership and collective action.

National campaigns are launched in response to issues affecting nurses or nursing, as a result of a Congress resolution or to affect policy development. Some campaigns will be specific to a region, country or area of practice.

The RCN will keep you updated via the website, Activate and social media. You can find out more about our current campaigns and get involved on our website at:

www.rcn.org.uk/campaigns
How to build and enhance the RCN’s reputation and influence

As a representative for the RCN it is your duty to build and enhance the reputation of the RCN in your workplace by:

- placing patients and patient safety at the forefront of everything you do
- supporting improvements in professional standards, contributing to the full range of nursing activity
- improving the way in which knowledge and evidence is used in decision-making to ensure that healthcare is safe, effective and centred on people.

The number of members we have in an organisation directly impacts on our strength and ability to influence. This is equally true when it comes to influencing policy at government level. Our reputation and influence depends on our ability to speak for the majority of nursing staff wherever we seek to make a difference.

As an RCN representative you will be seeking out opportunities to recruit new RCN members such as when a non-member asks for your advice. There are a wide range of resources available to help recruit and retain members and representatives. These include printed materials that can be ordered free-of-charge, information on planning an event and tips on recruitment and retention.

www.rcn.org.uk/activist
SECTION 11: MAINTAIN SAFE AND ACCURATE RECORDS OF YOUR ACTIVITY AS AN RCN REPRESENTATIVE

Organising and protecting your information

We all know how easy it is to be deluged with information. You will need to set up systems to deal with your paperwork, electronic files, correspondence and emails.

Always store member records safely and securely, and seek support from your local RCN office if you need resources to do this effectively. Keep information about individual cases confidential.

File your information into key headings. Make sure your RCN related papers are secure, preferably in a locked cabinet or password protected PC, in order to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Data Protection Act 1998

Do
- Shred documents containing personal data.
- Maintain personal data as securely as possible.
- Store all data securely.
- Think carefully about who you share information with, whether this is be email or conversation.

Further RCN guidance on data protection can be accessed through the RCN Direct online advice A-Z.

www.rcn.org.uk/advice

Refer to your role specific handbook for examples of what information should be recorded in relation to your role and for specifics on how this should be undertaken.

Do
- Leave printed output or devices containing data lying around unattended or in an unlocked office.
- Put documents containing personal data in a waste paper bin.
- Send personal data on CD through the post without security.
- Keep personal data for any longer than necessary.

Don’t
- Use information other than for the purpose for which it is registered.
- Disclose personal data over the telephone or email.
- Disclose personal data to a third party without the express permission of the person who is the subject of the data.
- Leave your PC unattended while you are logged into any system, you might leave sensitive information accessible to others.

In addition there are at least three different advanced skills workshops that aim to enhance your application of knowledge to specific issues, for example, organisational change and, strategic influencing. It is hoped that you will attend at least one RCN L&D event every year.

In addition, your local RCN office will organise regional/country events to keep you up-to-date with current issues, relevant policies and law.

Central to this is the mentorship support that you receive. It will enable you to develop your skills and knowledge in the workplace. RCN mentors play a key role in preparing and supporting you for competent practice. The aim of mentorship is to support you in your active role, enabling you to take responsibility for your own learning and development, and to become confident and self-reliant. Your mentor will work with you to agree and develop a tailored personal development plan. This is key to ensuring that you have the opportunity to access appropriate and meaningful learning and development opportunities.

As an accredited representative for the RCN you have a responsibility to ensure you are competent to practise in your elected role. It is the RCN’s responsibility to support your development and offer a continuous learning and development (L&D) programme for representatives.

In some areas, these L&D workshops are whole day events and in others they are half days as part of a local updating event.

The RCN publication Mentorship for RCN representatives – what to expect and how to prepare will give you further information.

www.rcn.org.uk/publications

Learning and development pathway

Newly accredited representatives are required to undertake a learning and development programme.

The RCN learning and development pathway is designed to support newly accredited representatives to achieve the practice standards for their role as an RCN representative. It focuses on meeting their learning outcomes in preparation for practice, and combines facilitated learning with structured supported learning. This enables them to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be an effective RCN representative. The programme is delivered by key RCN staff in their region/country, and other relevant parties.

Moving through the pathway

The following diagram depicts the journey that you will take from accreditation through to practice. You will be supported by an RCN mentor every step of the way.
Building evidence of your learning

A range of templates are available on the activist section of the RCN website to develop evidence of your learning in preparation for your practice as an RCN representative.

www.rcn.org.uk/pathway

UK joint representatives conferences

The RCN holds two UK-wide joint representative conferences each year. These events bring together accredited RCN stewards, learning representatives and safety representatives. The cost of attending is covered by the RCN. The conferences are a place to share ideas, discuss current workplace issues, and to find out more about government policy and RCN campaigns. You will also have an opportunity to network with fellow representatives from across the UK. The conferences are advertised in Activate and on the activist section of the RCN website.

www.rcn.org.uk/activist

The RCN promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies

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As you strive to make a difference in your role as a rep, there’ll inevitably be times when you’ll feel tested. But we’ll be with you every step of the way, offering the support and development you need to overcome challenges and make a real and lasting impact in the workplace.

Wear the badge on the outside.
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