



Royal College  
of Nursing

# Learning and Development for RCN Reps:

## Frequently asked questions



The RCN learning and development pathway is a quality assured framework of activities, designed to equip an RCN member for the role of RCN learning rep, safety rep, or steward.

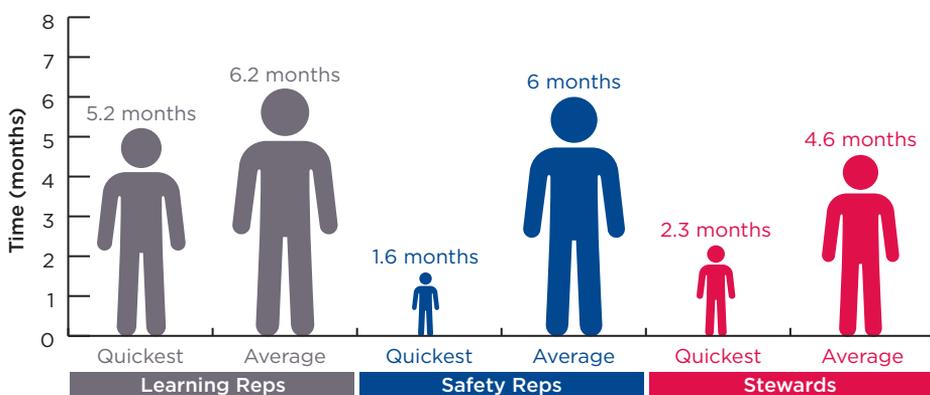
It is accredited by the Open College Network.

*“The professionalism of our pathway is what separates us from other trade unions. Without question, it makes certain that we turn out people who are properly prepared. We’re giving them a really solid foundation of knowledge they can rely on.”*

**Norman Provan, Associate Director,  
RCN Scotland**

## I've heard it takes a long time to complete the pathway — is that true?

On the contrary, our evidence shows that on average, from starting the foundation module, completion takes around four months for stewards, and six months for learning and safety reps. Initially everyone completes a foundation module, then reps progress to a specific development module where you explore your role in depth. Each module is five days and takes place over two months, with variations in how it's organised in each of the four countries.



## I've signed up. But do I have to wait until I've completed the pathway before I become active?

Not at all. From the time you're accredited, you're encouraged to be active in your workplace. As part of the foundation module, reps are expected to signpost members to information, increase the RCN's visibility in the workplace, and contribute to branch and campaign activities. The development module includes specific activities for each of the three kinds of reps.

## **I'm worried the pathway will be all theory and no practice?**

Of the five days, only around one-and-a-half days are theory, with the rest practical — for example, analysing case studies, researching information, and critiquing 'real life' role plays, for instance, a mock investigatory hearing or workplace inspection. You will also undertake various activities in your workplace, afterwards analysing what you've gained from the experience and where you might lack confidence or need extra support.

**83%** of respondents in our most recent evaluation agree the pathway prepared them for their roles, with the same number agreeing the content was relevant for their workplace.

## **How are the three kinds of reps each prepared for their different roles?**

Role descriptors articulate what each kind of rep should be able to do, with learning to help them achieve these goals. For **learning reps**, this includes supporting members with their continuing professional development and revalidation; carrying out career reviews; and accessing mandatory training. For **safety reps**, this includes skills to carry out a workplace inspection, identifying any issues to be raised with managers. For **stewards**, alongside representing members through case work, this includes being able to question and influence employers to resolve any issues organisationally.

## **Why isn't the pathway online?**

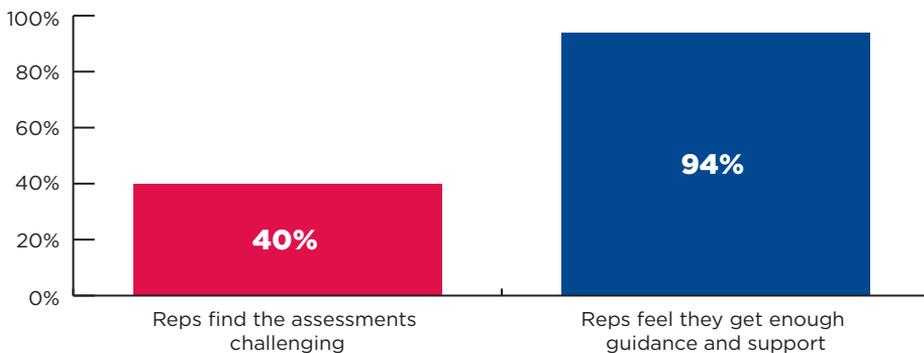
Our evidence shows that learners value face-to-face learning, and we believe this works best for the majority of the pathway. But some aspects naturally lend themselves to online learning — for example, a new data protection element was launched online in April 2018 and other aspects may follow. The RCN is also committed to providing more continuing development opportunities, co-designing them with reps, some of which will be available online.

## **I work in the independent sector — will the pathway still meet my needs?**

With around 20% of our members working in the independent sector, it's absolutely vital that the needs of their reps are reflected in the pathway. Reps are usually recruited here because either the RCN is the recognised trade union or has a learning agreement with the employer. Regionally or country-based RCN facilitators understand the local health care landscape, so they can support reps from the independent sector, as they move into practice within their own organisations.

## **I'm not good at exams. How will my learning be assessed?**

At the end of the foundation module, you'll be asked to produce three short learning statements as evidence of meeting the assessment criteria. Our evaluation shows that while 40% of reps find this challenging, 94% feel they get enough guidance and support to complete it. You should also undertake at least three defined activities, again writing them up briefly.



## **Will I be supported and supervised from the start?**

Yes. From the time you express interest, you're matched with an RCN supervising officer, who provides guidance throughout your time as a rep. In addition, there is a learning and development facilitator in every country and region, supporting you to complete the pathway.

**Want to find out more?**

**Visit [www.rcn.org.uk/become-a-rep](http://www.rcn.org.uk/become-a-rep)**

*“In our area, new reps ‘buddy up’ with a more experienced colleague, who helps them become established in their workplace.”*

**Rachel Morris, a former rep and now an RCN officer in the East Midlands**



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