Being a modern, progressive, professional trade union

The Value of Reps and Active Members
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When we started this work at the UK Joint Reps’ Conference towards the end of 2016 we didn’t realise how energised everyone would be to contribute and consider how we could value the work of our reps better. It mattered to us but we soon learnt how much it mattered to others. We would like to extend a thank you to the RCN reps, members and staff who took the time to share their views, ideas and stories to create this document and our vision for 2022.

We know that our members want a visible RCN presence in the workplace, they want to speak to someone locally who understands the issues that are important to them. We also know that our reps and active members are the best recruiters of new members, so investing in our reps means we continue to grow our membership. Reps also help to strengthen our professional activity by identifying the most relevant information, advice and guidance for their workplace, and ensuring RCN resources are easily accessible to their colleagues where and when they need them.

Everyone who is part of the RCN has a vested interest in increasing the number of reps and active members, for that is where our strength and success as a professional trade union lies. We can achieve this by continuing to work collaboratively together, sharing good practice and learning from each other to build a strong and sustainable future.

The new Trade Union Committee and the UK Learning Reps’, UK Safety Reps’ and UK Stewards’ Committees will be supporting you to drive this work forward and we will be checking in with you every year until 2022 asking you to share what you are doing so we can learn and improve together. We really want to keep the momentum for change going.

Over the next five years we would like us to build on the good practice and ideas written about here. We ask every RCN rep, branch, network, individual staff member and staff team to consider your contribution and the plans you have in place to recruit more reps and engage active members.

Finally, and most importantly, we are in no doubt that our future success as a professional trade union depends on this work and the positive investment each and every one of us makes in our reps and active members so thank you again for your contribution!
INTRODUCTION

Our 2022 vision
As a strong, progressive, professional trade union, led by members, the RCN continues to invest in growing and developing a vibrant community of reps and active members, taking every opportunity to celebrate their work, recognising the positive difference they make to the working lives of nursing staff and the people they care for.

Our plan
The RCN is a successful, professional union with members at our heart. This exciting document shares how reps, members and staff believe the RCN can continue to stay relevant and strengthen our trade union activity over the next five years through growing and supporting our community of reps and active members.

The document sets out how to:

Build on best practice – Over the next five years we want to enable you to build on the work you are already doing and the examples of great practice that are already happening.

Take forward new ideas – We want to support you to take forward the ideas from the Value of Reps engagement exercise that has been running over the past 12 months where members, reps and staff contributed their ideas.

Share what you do – We want you to share what you do and your examples of innovative practice on collaborating successfully with reps and members

Learn together – Our aim is to continue to learn together how we grow a vibrant and visible community of reps and active members that are committed to the values of the RCN and who also feel motivated to contribute to the RCN’s professional union activity.

Your role
A call to action! We hope you will feel inspired by this document and the vision that our rep community has developed and the values that underpin it. Please take your time to read the six themes within the framework, the best practice and the new ideas that are calls to action. Then invest in and lead your work locally to drive improvements. Continue to grow your community of reps and active members so the RCN stays relevant and we strengthen our position as a progressive exemplar of a professional union, led by members.

Making it happen
Overarching principles
When the vast amount of feedback from the engagement exercise was reviewed what came through strongly was the importance of these shared principles.
Overarching principles

Grow  Through co-ordinating and sharing best practice across the UK. Enable rapid improvement and learning that focuses upon growing our community of engaged reps and active members.

Collaborate  Work together at every level of the RCN to foster a culture that values and promotes the activities of RCN reps and active members in all that we do.

Invest  Continue to invest in support and supervision for all reps and increase their access to a range of continuing learning and development opportunities.

Engage  Strengthen engagement through branches and networks to build communities of reps and active members.

Listen  Undertake a biennial survey to measure progress and continually learn and improve.

Framework for action

The original six themes that formed part of the engagement exercise have become a framework for action.

They are:

Recruit  Increase the numbers of learning reps, safety reps and stewards to locally agreed targets.

Support and retain  Provide reps with the support and resources they need to do the job.

Develop  Enable reps to develop in their RCN role which will enrich their skills and could aid progression in their role or career.

Communicate  Continue to improve rep communication channels.

Impact  Capture and share the positive difference RCN reps make.

Celebrate  Take every opportunity to celebrate what reps do.
Achievements so far

Investment in a rep recruitment project
This project has been testing and evaluating what targeted action is most effective at increasing the recruitment of reps, including the trial of a new streamlined accreditation process. Great progress has been made in the four test regions. At the end of 2016, 34.2% of expressions of interest received were converted into newly accredited reps, this increased to 64% at the end of 2017. The time taken from expression of interest to accreditation as a new rep also fell from approximately two months to under one month. The conversion rates from expressions of interest to newly accredited reps at the beginning of 2018 was 47.5% in the test regions and 15.9% in the other England regions. The test regions have early evidence that their positive changes are leading to an increase in rep numbers.

Enhanced role descriptors
New rep role descriptors have been turned in to a desktop pyramid outlining the three rep roles and specific case studies highlighting the difference our reps have made in their workplaces. Copies have been sent to all RCN staff and reps to promote the rep roles and support rep recruitment.

Better access to expressing an interest in the rep role
An online expression of interest form has been introduced on the RCN website. Interested members can complete the form with their details and after submission will be contacted by their regional/country office to discuss the rep roles further.

A bigger and better Congress stand
In 2017, there was an improved rep stand at Congress with rep recruitment materials and a tailored rep recruitment process in place. During Congress 2017, 71 members expressed an interest in being an RCN rep. Out of these, 38 continued on their journey and are now expected to complete the learning and development pathway well before Congress 2018. Congress has proven to be a great recruitment opportunity. Work will continue to build on and improve this every year going forward.

Improved recruitment literature
In all new rep recruitment literature, we will articulate the personal and professional benefits of becoming a rep, the skills and knowledge acquired and how this can support career development. The language we use in relation to reps will have a greater focus on positive stories, bringing people together, with our shared values of fairness.

New opportunities to recruit
From March 2018, the RCN membership packs changed to a series of six postcards. If the recipient has been a member for five years, but not yet signed up to become a rep, one of the cards will ask them to consider stepping up into a rep role.

Enhanced partnership working between reps and staff
The RCN reps’ statement of expectations is being reviewed to clearly set out how partnership working between reps and RCN staff will build a strong, progressive, professional trade union. This has the potential to act as a recruitment tool as well as supporting and retaining reps in role.

Increase the numbers of learning reps, safety reps and stewards to locally agreed targets.
Examples of best practice

Reps recruiting reps

Worries about a lack of RCN representation on the ground led to a push to raise the RCN’s local profile at Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland. And among the results is the recruitment of around two dozen new reps over the last couple of years - up from a handful.

“We built on the positive engagement of our members who’d taken part in the highly successful pay campaign here,” says RCN steward and safety rep, David McKerr. “Recruiting more RCN reps means we can deliver a better service to our members.”

Creating an RCN presence is among the key changes he has helped to initiate. “We have more face-to-face contact,” explains David. “We make sure we visit all areas of the trust site at different times of the day, including the night shift.” He has also made the RCN a ‘visible brand’ wearing a shirt with an RCN logo, so staff can easily recognise their rep.

The moves have helped to transform the perception of the RCN, he believes. “We’re not just a trade union but also a professional body that supports nursing staff in a range of ways throughout their careers,” says David. “People will often only come to you when they’re in trouble, but we’re about much more than that. The RCN is a fantastic product – all we have to do is sell it. Why would nursing staff go anywhere else?”
Streamlined process to becoming a rep

A new process to streamline how reps are accredited is paying significant dividends, cutting the time it takes to around four weeks, rather than members waiting – sometimes for months.

Innovations include a digitalised system, replacing its paper-based predecessor. “In the past, there were nine or ten steps, three different forms, and at least five people involved,” says RCN Regional Director in the South East, Patricia Marquis. “Now we have one electronic form that takes you from expressing an interest to becoming accredited, and we’ve halved the number of steps.”

Among the tangible results is a much lower drop-out rate. “We used to lose a lot of people because everything took so long,” says Patricia. “Our own process was not helping us. But now it’s easier and more member-friendly.” Analysis of the four regions testing the new system shows that, over a three-month period, less than half of those applying were still waiting to become accredited, compared to more than three-quarters in the other regions.

“Behind each statistic is someone saying I want to be more involved in the RCN’s work and I want training, so I can help my colleagues,” says RCN England’s Business Manager, Michael Reilly. “They are offering us their time. And our ability to act on that quickly is crucial.”

For Plymouth Branch Chair and RCN Council member for the South West, Vicky Brotherton, the new system has made a huge difference. “Now we’re notified as soon as someone is interested, which means we can welcome them and begin to include them in what’s happening at their workplace straightaway. The more they can start joining in, the bigger the difference it makes for them.”

In the past, the lengthy process took several weeks. “Before the new system came in, we lost people because it took so long,” says Vicky. “I’m sure it put a lot of people off. Now our feedback is showing positive results, with one new rep telling me how straightforward and quick she had found it, with her local office being helpful, welcoming and encouraging.”

Using RCN Congress as a recruitment opportunity

More than 70 RCN members expressed their interest in becoming a rep after visiting a stand at RCN Congress. “It was very different to anything we’ve ever done before,” says Patricia Marquis, RCN South East Regional Director.

Among those chatting to prospective reps was RCN London Regional Director, Jude Diggins. “It was about engaging with people and giving them the time,” she says. “We took the approach that becoming a rep was good for your own professional development. You are offered lots of learning and development and it gives you something new and different to put on your CV.”

Chair of the UK Learning Reps’ Committee, Karen Sanders was also on the stand. “We shared the advantages and opportunities you have for your professional development and learning, which often go unrecognised,” she says. “I talked about the roles I’ve done within the RCN and what I’ve got out of them – the confidence, increased understanding, access to decision and policy makers, and the networking. There can be misconceptions about what the role involves, so we wanted people to understand what they could offer where they worked, exploring the possibilities.”

Introducing them to local reps was also key. “Meeting someone from their own area means there’s a familiar face straightaway,” says Karen. “People work closely together now, no matter whether they’re a steward, learning or safety rep. It’s collaboration, not isolation.”
Calls for action

Enable active members

• Mobilise every Student Committee member/student information officer to become an RCN rep at the end of their nurse training. Test out the most effective way to do this so we can capitalise on the high engagement of our student community and then roll this out across the UK.

• Explain what active membership means on the online RCN membership/joining form with an invitation to engage.

• Test a new type of active member role. This role could act as a potential stepping stone to a full rep role and help organise in the workplace.

Boost the RCN profile

• Use the NHS Staff Surveys to promote the role and benefits of RCN reps to employers.

• Promote an annual union week to raise the RCN’s profile, encourage members to become active, recruit reps and members.

In doing so, make staff and members feel part of something bigger through working in partnership together.

• Align the rep role with emergent activity such as the RCN diversity/inclusion champions as a driver for recruitment and retention.

Keep it local

• Run regular recruitment campaigns to highlight the need for reps and the benefits of becoming active within the RCN. Run specific campaigns targeted at particular areas, employers or types of rep and ensure the rep community reflects the diversity of our membership.

• Learn from Scrap the Cap. Campaigns are often the best way of engaging with members and persuading them to become more active. How can we encourage our members who have campaigned to remain active and join our rep community?

Reps recruit reps

• Our reps are well placed to spot potential reps. Equip our reps with better information and resources to recruit reps, using innovative recruitment practices.
**Achievements so far**

**Support and supervision for all reps**
Support and supervision standards are being developed for learning reps and safety reps in a UK project that will be testing and refining different and creative ways we can best support our whole rep community.

**Better access to notice board materials**
The portal for online design (POD) gives reps access to an area where they can tailor RCN-branded noticeboard materials for use in their workplaces. A launch to staff, was followed up by soft launch to reps at the UK Joint Reps Conference in October 2017 where a number of reps signed up as users. Further promotion of POD via Activate will follow throughout 2018.

**Dedicated space on the RCN website**
Reps have a dedicated area on the RCN website with access to a range of resources to support their active representation.

▶️ [www.rcn.org.uk/reps-hub](http://www.rcn.org.uk/reps-hub)

**Enhanced RCN library services for reps**
RCN reps have additional benefits when using the RCN library services. The RCN reps’ subject guides signpost to resources that relate to the rep role. Additionally reps are entitled to free postal loans, prioritised literature searches and library promotional materials to use in their workplaces.


**Active member diary for life**
Having listened to feedback from our members, the ‘activist’ diary has been updated. The result is the new “diary for life” – a more flexible, user-friendly resource that members can tailor to their own personal needs. In addition to the binder and 2018 diary section, members will receive additional content sections to clip in if they wish. The new format means we will be able to provide relevant content on a more regular basis, rather than sending a diary once a year with information that can quickly fall out of date. Members can also use the diary to store their own personal notes and resources.

**Continually improving the RCN’s case management system (CMS)**
The case management system is the envy of many other trade unions and currently supports stewards in the management of member cases and enquiries and enables them to receive the right level of support and supervision from officers. Over the next five years the RCN is making a commitment to upgrade the system so that it will enable all reps to access and record their RCN activity beyond casework alongside a fully re-built email system. Although some way off, the aspiration is for the system to be accessible from mobile technology.
Examples of best practice

Effective partnership working between RCN officers and representatives

Providing a package of support for reps pays huge dividends for senior RCN officer, Andrew Christaki, helping him to carry out his own responsibilities more effectively. “Their role in the workplace is key,” he says. “They support the members, raise the RCN’s profile and move things forward on national issues, such as pay. Knowing how important they are, I’ve made supporting them my priority.”

Aiming to meet stewards, learning and safety reps face-to-face every month is a big investment of time, but he feels it’s worth it for a number of reasons. “It’s not just about catching up with case work,” says Andrew. “For me they’re my intelligence. They are my eyes and ears on the ground, helping me to gather information, so I know what’s happening on the frontline and how our members are feeling.”

The monthly meetings are a two-way dialogue. Andrew helps reps keep themselves up-to-date with national campaigns affecting the wider nursing workforce, strengthening the RCN’s profile on the ground. Meanwhile reps brief Andrew on local partnership working, health and safety, learning and development issues in their workplaces and any challenges they are facing.

One result of this close and nurturing relationship is that reps feel more confident in their abilities. “I think some reps feel able to take on more complex work because they know they have support and advice on hand when they need it,” says Andrew. “And if they are taking on more case work, then it’s not coming into the office to be dealt with solely by officers.”

Even those reps who don’t want to be involved in cases play a vital role in other areas, such as lobbying and promoting the RCN. “When members don’t see us on the ground, they don’t know what we’re doing, but having visibly active reps helps nursing staff understand all we offer,” he says. “And because we’re familiar faces, they will also come and talk to us much more readily about what’s happening where they are working. Sometimes we’ve been able to intervene before a situation escalates.”

He identifies this ability to sort issues out more quickly as another major benefit. “If there’s a problem, our reps know precisely who to contact, with relationships that have been established over time,” says Andrew. “I’m a great believer in avoiding formal procedures, such as grievances, wherever possible, resolving things with an informal discussion based on good working relationships. Usually this leads to a far better outcome for the member.”

It also sends a powerful message to employers, he says. “If we have good and effective reps, our relationship with an organisation is strengthened,” says Andrew. “And if they know they’re having regular support and supervision, it gives employers confidence that we take supporting our reps seriously.”

Steward Sue Bacon agrees, saying: “if I’m dealing with something complex, I’ll ask for advice. Andrew is always on the end of the phone, so I feel very supported in my role.”

Lead steward, learning rep and convenor Jeanette Jones also values Andrew’s approach. “He gives me an opportunity to explore an issue in my own way”, she says. “A good supervising officer encourages you to grow, rather than telling you what to do. If you’ve learnt something for yourself, you remember it a lot more than if someone has just given you the answer. Andrew encourages me to come to my own conclusions.”
Strengthening our presence in the independent sector

A significant proportion of the RCN’s membership work in the independent sector says the RCN’s lead for these organisations, RCN National Officer, Emma Lenehan.

But there are challenges, including overcoming the isolation of smaller workplaces, such as care homes; the lack of structured meetings between employers and trade unions and the need to increase understanding of the positive benefits the RCN can bring to an organisation. “Engaging with employers at a national level is crucial so they understand what the RCN can offer,” says Emma.

Over the last five years, she has witnessed the number of reps quadruple at some of the largest employers. To strengthen their network, she organises twice yearly national meetings where reps can come together to share information. “I don’t dictate what to do,” says Emma. “I listen to them, find out what their needs are and then support them. We have such fantastic teams of people. I hope this gives them the drive and impetus to carry on doing their great work.”

Investing time in building relationships has proved invaluable, she believes. In one instance, the RCN was able to question the national imposition of a package of terms and conditions that would have left many members severely out of pocket. “We had reps on the ground who could share what was happening,” she recalls. “We successfully challenged the lack of consultation. Reps can identify issues that need addressing before they become problems.”

Luke Fowkes-Goodwin believes his role as an RCN learning rep complements his work as a practice development nurse and NMC teacher with the Priory Group. “I feel it strengthens what I’m already doing,” he says. “As an organisation, we have the help and support of working in partnership with the RCN. It also adds value to me as a nurse, as the RCN reps’ course was externally validated and recognised, which enhances my own development.”

Having completed his training in autumn 2017, Luke is now keen to draw up a learning agreement with his employer and also encourage more people both to join the RCN and think about becoming a rep. “I’ve always been a strong advocate for people to become RCN members,” he says. “There’s a misconception among some people that unions are just there to create noise about problems, but I talk to them about all the benefits - for example, opportunities for learning and development, networking and the amount of expertise available.”

David Boyle also combines his role as Elysium Healthcare’s Employment Engagement Lead in the North West with being both an RCN learning rep and a steward. “It is challenging,” he says, admitting that initially there were questions about his trustworthiness from both members and managers. “It’s a diplomatic role that needs a delicate balance, but I feel I’m in a really good place now. Although it’s taken a long time, I think both staff and managers see me as someone who is fair, with very good working relationships based on openness and honest conversations. It’s about a collaborative way of working.”

He believes his senior position within the company, and particularly the trust and credibility he has gained through dealing with some difficult situations, supports his ability to achieve resolution and influence things positively. “I can have a balanced view of what’s happened and what needs to happen now, getting both the member and their manager to agree the best decision for both sides that is fair, proportionate and maintains professional standards,” says David.

His training as a steward has boosted his knowledge of issues such as employment law and the policies and processes that impact on staff. “Also, the support I have through my RCN supervising officer and meeting other reps really helps me think about how I’m handling different issues – and whether there are other approaches that might work better,” says David.
Building a community of reps as changemakers

A new community of changemakers are sharing their experiences, ideas and energy to create positive changes in workplaces around the country. “Every rep has the potential to become a changemaker,” says the project’s lead, Mairead O’Siochru. “You just need passion and commitment and a wish to motivate and inspire others.”

Representing every country and English region, changemakers have their own Facebook page, helping them to connect with each other, relaying stories and thoughts about how they can become even more effective drivers of change. “Changemakers share a willingness, courage and determination to do something measurable to improve the lot of others,” says Mairead.

For steward Linda Rumbles, who works in Scotland, becoming a changemaker is an honour. “To be recognised by the RCN is a great feeling,” she says. “Being a changemaker has made me stop and think about what we all do and why we do it. Often, we just go about our business, but this reminds us that individuals can make a difference. Although we’ve only been a group for a short time, we’re already swapping information, knowledge and advice. For instance, if someone already has a policy or guidance on something that I can borrow and use as a blueprint, it saves a lot of time.”

“Becoming a changemaker has been wonderful,” says Jeremy Davies, a learning rep and steward in Wales. “Changemakers are willing to go that little bit further, whether to move the profession forwards or to put something right. I hope our work continues into the future, inspiring others to join us.”

Supporting reps to campaign in partnership with staff

Creating pay champions has helped to push forward the RCN’s UK-wide Scrap the Cap campaign in Northern Ireland. “It was a member-led campaign and people engaged very positively with it,” says Garrett Martin, RCN Northern Ireland Deputy Director.

A fortnightly meeting and teleconference were part of a formal structure, which mirrored the national drive to persuade the Westminster government to abandon its policy of capping annual public sector pay awards at 1%.

Activities included securing meetings with 17 out of 18 Northern Ireland MPs. “Meeting an MP can be a daunting experience, so we made sure everyone was accompanied by a senior RCN officer, who was well briefed on all the issues,” says Garrett. “But we know it makes a difference when MPs hear from nurses at the frontline.”

For rep and Trade Union Secretary Joanne Stevenson, of South Eastern Trust, pay champions have been crucial in getting information quickly to as many people as possible. “We’ve had people from all parts of the Trust showing an interest and helping to rally support,” she says. “They have also helped promote our messages through social media.”
Sustaining rep activity in different ways

Using different models of support for reps – from formal supervision to group learning sessions – support and supervision delivers a wealth of benefits for everyone, believes Ros Shaw, RCN Senior Officer in Scotland, who covers Lothian and Borders.

Every year, she organises three day-long events where stewards, safety and learning reps can come together, share information and learn from each other. “It’s open to everyone, whether they’re a newcomer or have years of experience,” says Ros. “It’s a time for them to meet up with each other, catch-up with what’s happening with the RCN, both nationally and locally, and raise anything that they might need some help with too.”

Every agenda is different, but in the past, they have held successful sessions based around reviewing a case, to see how they might have handled it themselves. “Seeing it from different perspectives was really useful for everyone,” says Ros. “We had some really good suggestions, including from learning reps who don’t usually get involved in this kind of casework, so they had a whole different spin.”

In addition, stewards who are involved in representing members’ cases have regular formal support and supervision, with those on facilities time meeting every couple of months for a three-hour session. “That’s where I can gather intelligence about what’s really happening on the ground,” says Ros.

Although she admits that providing this level of support can appear time-consuming, Ros actually believes it saves time. “It builds relationships, helping me get to know each rep, including their strengths and weaknesses and what kind of cases and activity they prefer,” she says. “I feel reassured that the reps know what they’re doing, and our members are being represented properly. I also want to feel confident that if they need help, they will pick up the phone and ask, at any time. Reps need to know they have our support and that they’re doing the very best they can for the member they’re representing. I provide that extra support, especially if they’re dealing with something difficult.”

Although Linda Rumbles is an experienced steward, she still believes it’s vital for reps to know they have a high level of continuing support. “None of us do it alone,” she says. “Everyone has times when they struggle with something, no matter how many years you have been a rep. And there is always something new to learn that you haven’t come across before.”

In Wales, the isolation of reps who work in rural areas is being tackled through various initiatives, including regular regional networking meetings held in a different place each time. “We have some large rural areas with members and reps spread widely, posing some real challenges,” says Alison Goodfield, RCN Senior Officer in Wales. This includes localities where many members work in the community, with no central meeting space.

RCN officers also visit reps in their workplaces, giving face-to-face support. “Supporting our reps needs a mixed approach,” says Alison. Special events focused on topical issues can also help networking and recruitment. “There can often be a concentration of reps in one area, then a large gap, but we’re identifying these and trying to get a more even spread of people,” she says.

All stewards, safety and learning reps are offered supervision, with one-to-one and group sessions available for everyone. Reps are also actively encouraged to work together as a team, says Alison. “We want them to support each other, understanding more about each other’s roles,” she says.

Action learning sets involving all three kinds of reps help to bolster understanding. “In one session, it was a learning rep who created a turning point,” says Alison. “A steward had brought along a case that had been going on for nearly a year, asking for help. The learning rep asked some very pertinent questions that made the group see things differently. By the end, the steward had a new plan of action to support the member that wouldn’t have happened otherwise.”

Learning rep, Lukie Spencer recalls that a fresh perspective was needed. “Through your own experiences, you bring different questions to the table,” she says. “It was an extremely productive session that gave us all food for thought. It’s really important to have this time together to explore...”
issues in detail. Everyone has something different to offer and it generates ideas.”

Safety rep and steward Ann Murphy welcomed the input of Lukie and her colleagues. “By taking it to the group, I had a much wider view, and I could go back and reinforce my case. I felt much more confident and happy representing the member.”

As the person was originally facing dismissal, the outcome of a written warning was also much better than expected. “Sometimes when you’re dealing with a long or complicated case, you can get lost,” says Ann. “But listening to the views of people who work in different areas, and drawing on their experiences, can really help. It also gives me reassurance that I’m on the right lines.”

This approach has proved so successful that it has become a regular feature of the meetings. “Dealing with one case at a time means you can really concentrate on it,” says Ann. Meanwhile outside the sessions, reps are seeking advice from each other about their more complex cases. “We’re working together much more cohesively as a team now,” she adds.

Supporting stewards with their casework

When Greg Usrey first became an RCN steward more than a decade ago, records of his work representing members were only kept on paper. “And a lot of us didn’t have filing cabinet space,” he recalls. “Everything was a paper file, kept by me, and as long as I had that file, no one else could know the status of the case. So, if I was sick, nobody could have picked up my work. Potentially, it was a nightmare.”

Today it’s a different story, with a tailored electronic case management system that enables everything to be recorded, with others having access as appropriate. “It’s a safe and secure electronic vault, with every single piece of information, email and note about each case,” says Greg, who is based in Glasgow. “My RCN supervising officer has direct access to it too. To go from what I had, to what we have now, is like night and day.”

For Greg, the system echoes how nursing staff are expected to perform in their professional lives. “As a clinician, you couldn’t imagine going in to see a patient and providing care, without then making some notes about what you’d done. Accurate record-keeping is integral to what we do,” he says.

Alongside helping stewards to manage their caseloads more effectively, another benefit is enabling the collection of data to help to spot patterns and trends – whether locally or nationally. “For example, if we can see that a particular unit has a disproportionate number of cases or we are getting lots of cases that involve documentation, we can highlight them,” says Janice Smyth, Director RCN Northern Ireland, who was instrumental in getting the system off the ground. “It can help to identify both what’s happening in workplaces, and also whether it’s happening more widely, affecting nursing staff across the UK. Understanding the bigger picture helps us to shape policy.”

Currently the system is used by stewards and officers, but there are future plans for it to be rolled out for use by learning and safety reps so they can record their activity. “We’ll be able to quantify the contribution they make,” explains Janice. “It will help to make their work more visible, demonstrating their value.”
SUPPORT AND RETAIN

Providing the right resources

- 'Event in a box'. Provide a suite of printed materials promoting the RCN, membership and the rep roles that reps can use for events and order when they need.
- For all relevant new RCN publications produce a 'key points' summary for RCN reps to be distributed via Activate.
- Have a dedicated RCN advice line for reps to call when their officer is not available, for example, out of hours.
- Consider the needs of reps if an RCN mobile app is developed.

Reps supporting reps

- Provide more opportunities for reps to meet and network regularly in their region/country, face-to-face and virtually.
- Capture and promote positive stories about branches working effectively and supporting reps.

Learning from reps' experiences

- Use a new biennial survey of reps to ask for reflections on what the RCN is doing well and what support is still needed.
- Learn from and replicate the work done across England to encourage collaborative working with staff networks and equality leads through the Building Better Partnerships conference and seminar series that is run every two years.

Helping officers to support reps

- Continue to offer reps support to secure facilities time.
- Invite officers to the learning and safety rep modules so they can learn more about how to support reps in these roles.
- Clarify the RCN’s expectations of learning reps and safety reps in the same way we have of stewards with casework.
- Provide small – but meaningful – gestures. A thank you card at the close of a difficult case, a well-run learning event or a safety inspection that influenced workplace changes.

Calls for action
Enable reps to develop in their RCN role which will enrich their skills and could aid progression in their role or career.

**Achievements so far**

**Investment in an online learner management system**

Work has started to develop an online learner management system to manage and enhance our reps’ learning and development. This will provide reps with the opportunity to use technology to enhance their learning with the RCN.

**Developing a resource to support reps who wish to become active on staff side**

Designed collaboratively with reps who are already in staff side roles, a new resource will be launched in 2018 that will enable reps to understand and strengthen the contribution they make to staff side.

**Offering a programme of continuing learning and development**

Throughout the UK RCN reps are offered access to local conferences and workshops that enable them to network with each other and develop in their RCN role.

**Offering reps discounted places at RCN Conferences**

Reps are entitled to 25% off the member rate for RCN conferences organised solely by the RCN.

**UK Joint Reps’ Conferences**

Designed by reps for reps, two UK-wide joint reps conferences take place each year. They provide an opportunity to get updated and for reps to have their say on key nursing employment issues and RCN campaigns, and to network with other reps from across the UK.

**Delivering equality and inclusion events**

Specific learning and development is now available on working with the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) and other equality tools such as the Equality Delivery System (II) as well as advanced work taking place on understanding the Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) in order to strengthen accountability and partnership working at local level.
Examples of best practice

Providing high quality learning and development

An externally accredited learning and development pathway makes certain that every RCN rep has the knowledge and skills they need to be able to carry out their role, giving members the best service possible.

“Our reps’ learning and development is really comprehensive, current and relevant,” says Norman Provan, Associate Director, RCN Scotland. “In my view, 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 to take on their role.”

The first module of the pathway is for all newly accredited reps together, where members can either confirm or change their role to become a steward, learning rep or safety rep, with a second module dedicated to that role. Far from a ‘chalk and talk’ approach to learning, participants can expect to be involved in role-playing different scenarios, while they learn more about the organisation and current legislation. “It’s immersive,” says Norman. “We’re giving them a really solid foundation of knowledge that they can rely on.”

As part of the programme, reps meet local staff who undertake a variety of roles and experienced reps who share their own experience. “We want to make sure they understand how much we value their contribution and that they are regarded as integral to the team, rather than a remote arm,” says Norman. Throughout their learning journey, reps are supported by their supervising officer. This support and supervision continues beyond the initial pathway and into the rep’s practice.

Between the two modules, reps are attached to an officer. “During that time, they will be out with them gaining experience,” says Norman. “For example, they might be looking at how they would support members to prepare their response for a disciplinary hearing or actually attending one. They can then match their learning to practice. We believe that this consolidated education base plus continuing support gives them the best chance of operating well.”

Jane Lavelle finished her course in January and is now a steward in Leicester. “On the final day of my training, I had a message asking me to support a member,” she says. “I’ve started straight away, and that’s great. I feel that what I’ve done has prepared me very well. The course has covered everything, combining role play with theory.”

She has been especially impressed by the professionalism. “How cases are handled has been enlightening,” says Jane. “I’ve learnt so much more about what’s expected of you, why, and what are the most productive ways to work, including trying to facilitate progress on all sides. I feel very measured now in what I’m doing.”

RCN steward Angie Scarfe agrees. “The professionalism of the whole package has been diamond cut,” she says. Angie finished her course in February and is now a steward in Lincolnshire. “The training has been an absolute pleasure,” she says. “The respect that everyone gets is extraordinary. And you’re never left on your own. You know there is always someone there to support you - whether your trainer, supervising officer or one of your rep colleagues.”

Using technology to enhance our learning offer for reps

Whilst learning and development for RCN reps is currently all face-to-face, this is set to change, with new online resources being developed. “What we do already is high quality and highly regarded, so we won’t be replacing it,” explains RCN learning and development facilitator, Emily Spencer-Rigby. “Instead we’re looking at how we can use online learning to make it even better, widening participation.”

One of the key issues she has identified is a lack of accessibility for some reps to be able to carry on learning, once they have completed their foundation and development modules. “We know some reps really struggle to get to workshops,” says Emily. “Especially those who live in more rural areas, or are trying to juggle work and family responsibilities.”
Being able to refresh learning is another area where instantly available online resources could prove useful. “You may have learnt something a while ago, but not had the opportunity to use your knowledge since,” says Emily. “Watching a quick video, perhaps of a role play, or reading some top tips might be all you need to feel confident again.”

But there will always be an important place for face-to-face learning and printed materials, she believes. “We need to think about what the most appropriate medium is – for example, if you’re looking at something such as developing questioning and influencing skills or presenting a case, I think that will always need to be taught face-to-face,” says Emily.

The new initiative also provides an opportunity to streamline how learning is managed, improving record-keeping with better administration systems. In addition, all new learning is being co-designed with reps themselves, with a stakeholder group of reps who will be offering ideas, suggestions and content. “Our reps are at the heart of this, helping to develop both the content and activities,” says Emily.

Learning and networking for reps in Scotland

Every year, reps in Scotland are invited to attend a two-day annual conference, which attracts around 100 people, including Council members, staff and invited speakers. “There’s a balance between networking, serious learning and some fun,” says Alison Manners, Professional Learning and Development Lead in RCN Scotland. “It’s also an opportunity for us to say ‘thank you’ and show we care about our reps and the contribution they make.”

Alternating between venues on the east and west of Scotland, last year’s event was called ‘Making your move – standing up and speaking out for patients and nursing’. Themed around the different stages of a chess game, activities included planning your first moves – looking at how to prepare for meetings and gathering information; reading the game – exploring body language; and how small moves can sometimes lead to bigger consequences, looking at the decisions reps may make and their possible outcomes. There were also keynote speakers, including the RCN’s Chief Executive & General Secretary and the RCN’s Director in Scotland.

“All of the learning is linked to the roles that reps perform, so it counts towards their continuing learning and development,” says Alison. “And our evaluations show that they really enjoy it and get a lot from it.” As one participant commented: “I left feeling highly motivated and an essential part of the organisation.”

Reps are also invited to share their own experiences. Among those who spoke was Board member and RCN steward, Bruce Honeyman. “The theme was implementing change, and I talked about an example that I felt was relevant,” he says. “In my workplace, there were some unforeseen effects of what initially appeared to be a small change, with staff in other areas feeling very concerned about the potential impact. It demonstrated the need for a robust impact assessment. Overall, the conference was really worthwhile, both in terms of content and the chance to network with your colleagues.”

Enhancing career development

“If you’d asked me 10 years ago, would I be doing this, I’d have said not on your life,” says Rachel Morris, a former rep in Northamptonshire who joined the RCN as an officer in the East Midlands in December 2017. “Taking on all the RCN roles I’ve had over the years has given me confidence,” she says. “I’m not naturally confident, but I’ve changed and I’m a totally different person now. I tend to look at things with a more open mind.”

Rachel’s journey began more than a decade ago, when she became an RCN steward and a safety rep. “Like many others, I decided to become a rep
because I faced injustice,” she explains. “I wanted to make sure that no one else would go through what I had – not on my watch. And it’s a good feeling to support other people through difficult times at work, helping them to have peace in at least one part of their life.”

When the Chair of her local staff side stepped down, Rachel was asked if she would like to take on the role, which she has held over the last six years through some turbulent and challenging times. “But we’ve come out the other side and hopefully there’s a new chapter, now we’ve signed our partnership agreement,” says Rachel.

Strengthening her own resilience has been key. “You’re dealing with people who have had the worst thing happen to them at work and that can affect you, if you let it,” says Rachel. “But as a clinician you’re often dealing with life and death on a daily basis and that helps you to build a tough skin.”

She also became Branch Chair, helping to reinvigorate the RCN locally, increasing the number of reps from three to more than 20, and improving engagement, including encouraging members to become involved in the RCN’s national pay campaign. When the opportunity to work for the RCN as a local officer arose, she successfully applied.

“I felt I had gained so much knowledge and skills that I didn’t want to lose,” says Rachel. “Although I miss having contact with patients, I see those who I support through my RCN role as being in similar need, so I try to give them the best and most compassionate care I can. They need support, advice and sometimes affirmation that they are on the right track.”

Dionne Daniel from London says she has benefitted enormously from being an RCN learning rep, especially as a member of the black and minority ethnic (BME) community. “As a senior BME nurse in the NHS, being closely involved with the RCN supports both me and my practice,” she says. “I’ve been given so many opportunities as a rep, including important meetings that I wouldn’t have been invited to otherwise. My role has given me good exposure and I wouldn’t be the nurse that I am today without it. Sometimes there can be anxiety about senior managers taking on these roles. But I think it has made me a better manager.”
Sharing and learning for reps across the UK

Every rep is invited to attend two UK-wide conferences every year, with 2017’s taking place in Milton Keynes and Newcastle. According to an evaluation, almost 70% of those responding said they always try to attend the conference if possible, with a similar number valuing the chance to network and share practice with colleagues from other countries and regions. The conference is designed by reps for reps with some great speakers and group work to enable the ideas to be applied to the rep role.

Comments from reps taking part included:

“I thoroughly enjoyed the conference, very motivational and empowering…”

“Met some fantastic reps, with loads of ideas that I can bring back to my workplace.”

“A feeling of being part of something that could positively influence and impact on front line staff situations and experience.”
Calls for action

Reps supporting reps
- Better-connect reps with each other for peer support through buddying.

Using continuing learning and development to support reps
- Invest in developing reps as local leaders and changemakers.
- Use continuing learning and development to support local organising activities.
- Strengthen rep skills in dealing with distressed members and promoting better mental health.

Helping officers to support reps
- Offer officers resources and training on all three RCN rep roles and focus on how officers can continue to contribute to strategic and partnership work to prevent casework arising and promote a positive workplace culture.

- Consider how best to ensure that rep support and supervision focuses on the needs of reps. The way we currently capture KPIs on support and supervision doesn’t do this. KPIs could emphasise outcomes (what happened as a result of the supervision) rather than process (did the meeting take place?). Possible outcome measures could be:
  - learning and development plan
  - evidence of impact made
  - reps say they are receiving appropriate support and supervision in their role.
Continue to improve rep communication channels

Achievements so far

Going online
Activate has a new online digital platform. Its effectiveness as a tool to communicate with reps is also being reviewed.

Engaging active members
A new project will be developed in 2018 to explore how we can engage active members more effectively. The project will enable us to explore different ideas about the role of ‘active members’ and the activities they can carry out locally around issues that matter to the members in their workplace. It will also support regional and country teams to build effective workplace representation for the 21st century and increase RCN visibility and influence.

Capitalising on the Member Communication Centre
A new initiative is enabling members to better communicate with each other which is having real benefits for branches and helping them engage with members.

Examples of best practice

Strengthening communication between officers and reps
Every week reps and key stakeholders in Northern Ireland are emailed a briefing, detailing the latest news, events and courses. “It’s very well received,” says RCN Senior Officer, Desmond Lowry. “Our reps are hungry for information and like to be kept informed about what’s happening.”

There’s also a thriving professional development programme for reps, with a residential conference and around five other events held each year. “It’s not mandatory, but a good way of keeping in touch,” says Desmond. Regular group meetings, one-to-ones and being in contact on the phone and email also help.

“Good communication is essential at any time,” Desmond believes. “But it’s particularly important in today’s world, where we seem to have crisis after crisis and such shortages of nursing staff. I would say that open lines are communication are crucial.”
Mobilising networks for campaigning

A cycle ride around North Norfolk villages, a candlelit vigil outside Norwich Cathedral and church bell-ringing were just some of the ways that the RCN’s Eastern Region mobilised support for the highly successful Scrap the Cap pay campaign. “It all helped to bring attention to our campaign and was very positive,” says local RCN officer, Nikki Ward. Even a village shop was persuaded to join in, putting up posters and collecting postcards with messages for MPs. These urged them to back fair pay for NHS nursing staff, with an end to the years of fixed pay awards of 1 per cent or less.

Reps and members reached out to the public by holding events in public areas of trusts, rather than the staff canteen, and visiting towns on market days. “The public was amazing,” says Nikki. “They listened and understood, signing our cards and wearing our badges. It is hugely important that the public understands what we’re trying to achieve. After all it’s their health service - and good quality, safe and effective patient care is why we’re campaigning.”

Members were encouraged to join in via social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, posting regular updates and pictures of those taking part. The region also invited members to become local pay champions. As a result of all their activities, they collected the most campaign postcards of any region or country. “It was only possible by getting out there and asking people to support us. I feel really proud of what we’ve achieved,” Nikki adds.

RCN safety rep, Michael Oyeleye, discussed the difficulties faced by many nursing staff with his local Bedfordshire MP, Andrew Selous, who sits on the Health Select Committee. Encouraging as many nursing staff as possible to take part in the campaign was vital to its eventual success, Michael believes.

“We did it by being physically present and talking to as many people as we could, explaining how this was impacting them and giving them clarity on the issues,” he says. “Getting so many people on board, and motivating them to take action, makes certain that the government understands this is affecting everyone - not just a few. It shows we are the voice of the majority.”

Improving the way members communicate with each other

An initiative launched two years ago is improving the way that members communicate with each other, with particular benefits for how branches keep their local members informed and engaged.

The Member Communication Centre means that those reps who have been specially trained can directly email members in their locality. “As a member-led organisation, it’s really important that those who hold an RCN role can talk to the people they represent,” explains Theresa Fyffe, Director of the RCN in Scotland. “Those who use the system feel a sense of empowerment and find it very effective. It’s another tool in their box.”

Chair of the RCN’s Ayrshire and Arran Branch, steward Julie Lamberth has been using it for more than a year now, with some great results. “It gives us the opportunity to communicate with all the members in our patch,” she says. “But you can also target specific groups with information especially for them, for example health care assistants or nursing students.”

Attendances at local RCN-led workshops on revalidation were boosted when Julie sent out a special email inviting members along to get the help they need. “It’s important to think about issues such as the heading you use, as this can really encourage people to open the email,” says Julie. “I also try and keep the message short and to the point.”

As reps control the new system themselves, rather than having to rely on staff to send messages, communication can be much more instant. Emails are personalised too, and it’s possible to track how many members open each one. “I also include my contact details, so people can respond directly to me,” says Julie. “Members like knowing who their local RCN person is and how best to reach them.”
COMMUNICATE

Calls for action

Talking to each other
• Review the language and tone of communications – emphasising the values of partnership and mutual respect between staff and reps. We could also consider stopping use of the term ‘disaccreditation’ when reps step down or retire from the role.
• Develop more digital communication for reps.
• Use text alerts for reps to let them know about new resources.

Talking to the world
• Use all social media opportunities to promote the rep role – flagging how ‘you can make a difference’ by becoming a rep.
• Develop an email banner with pictures of RCN reps and the strapline: RCN reps – making a positive difference to the working lives of nursing staff and the people they care for.
• Review rep branding to link with this framework for action and its themes.
Capture and share the positive difference RCN representatives make.

**Achievements so far**

**Producing films of the difference RCN reps make**

New RCN films featuring Alex Scott, RCN steward, Karen Dutton, RCN learning rep and Catherine Salter, RCN safety rep* have been produced. The films showcase the difference reps make in their workplace and the high regard their employers have for the work they do as an RCN rep. They are available on the RCN website and will continue to be widely promoted on social media.

**Campaigning on safe and effective staffing**

The RCN will be launching a campaign on safe and effective staffing at Congress 2018. RCN reps have been involved in shaping the campaign and will be working in partnership with staff to co-design resources to influence workplaces on safe staffing levels.

**Developing evidence on the economic value of facilities time**

The RCN commissioned research to explore the economic value of facilities time and a resource for reps to use in their workplace which demonstrates the value of facilities time to employers.

**Showcasing the difference RCN reps make**

A set of pull-up posters have been developed for use at conferences and events, each showcasing an individual rep and the difference they have made in their workplaces.

**Examples of best practice**

**The difference a rep makes**

Working in partnership has led to a sea change in the Trust where Alex Scott has been an RCN steward since 2013. “In every case, whether it’s about an individual or organisation-wide, we approach issues looking for consensus first and foremost,” he says. “Where there is contention, differences or challenges, focusing on what you have in common helps build trust and confidence, making situations easier to work through.”

His contribution is celebrated in a specially made short RCN film, which showcases some of the achievements in which he has played a key role. “It captures some of the ways you can influence the culture of an organisation, by working in partnership with people, especially when you’re dealing with significant challenges, such as budget constraints,” says Alex.

He hopes that the film will help to dispel the myth that becoming a rep thwarts your career progression. “It’s not like that at all,” says Alex. In contrast, he believes that it enhances professional development, with the confidence and skills reps gain potentially improving their promotion prospects.

* Alex Scott and Catherine Salter have subsequently became RCN staff members but were filmed when they were reps.
“I also hope that it helps organisations to realise that if they invest in working in this way, it will save them money in the longer term,” says Alex. For instance, among the tangible differences is a major reduction in formal cases over the last couple of years – from more than 40 to around 10 at any one time. “They are a huge drain on staff time and a huge cost to the organisation too. Organisations should not just measure the cost, but realise the value,” he adds.

For Alex, the Trust has now become a very different place to work – and his view is backed by a national staff satisfaction survey of all NHS trusts in England. The organisation emerged top of all the community and mental health trusts, both as a place staff would recommend to others for employment, or for their loved ones to receive treatment. “There’s been a steady increase in engagement from staff, openness and transparency,” says Alex. “Our Trust shares information, where so many others don’t. A lot of my role is about highlighting what we’re doing well and reflecting it back. This way works – and we’re proving it.”

In 2017 Alex became an RCN officer in the in the East Midlands region.

RCN steward and Chair of the Norfolk Branch, Helen Oatham is among those whose work has been featured on specially commissioned posters, designed to highlight the positive contribution reps make in workplaces all over the UK.

In this instance, Helen’s poster shares her story of helping learning disability nursing staff, who feared they would lose out financially following redeployment. As their RCN steward, Helen was able to suggest a way forward that protected staff’s entitlements, by gathering evidence to show they were financially disadvantaged through changes in shift patterns. The end result was that the Trust agreed to protect their enhancements, leaving staff feeling much happier.

“There’s a misconception that sometimes you have to throw all your toys out of the pram to get something - but actually it’s usually about being fair and reasonable,” says Helen. “The RCN has built a good working relationship with HR over time, so it was easy to find a solution that helped everyone to feel happier and less anxious. These are long-serving staff, who already faced the prospect of significant upheaval in their working lives, so it’s only fair that they shouldn’t be financially penalised too.”

Another whose work has been highlighted is RCN learning rep Hamira Ghafoor, who is based in Oxford. Inspired by a passion to bring staff together from different backgrounds, she has used a variety of ways to raise awareness of race equality and inclusion in her workplace.

“When you look at something on your own, you’ll only ever see things from your angle,” says Hamira. “But when you include people from diverse backgrounds, you widen your lens and enhance your vision.”

Among her successful initiatives has been helping to organise an event marking Eid-ul-Fitr, which follows the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during daylight hours. A second event a year later, which included interactive learning, attracted more than double the numbers.

She has also joined the Trust’s Race Equality Action Group, collated staff stories to share, and taken part in discussions looking at how to help more black and minority ethnic (BME) staff progress further in their careers. This follows Work Race Equality Standards (WRES) data which shows a disproportionate number remain at lower bands. Interview and presentation skills training are among the initiatives to help enhance the promotion prospects and confidence of BME staff. The latest WRES report indicates a small but positive shift in BME staff moving into higher bands. “For a long time, race equality had the back seat in the room,” says Hamira. “Today it has a seat at the front table and is part of the conversation.”
As Cecilia said, "We are the ones who run towards the trouble!!"

Support

Positive Changes

ACN Reps

Empower!!

Proud

Heroes!

1st

Mantra: Student Well-Being

Be the change you want to see.

Appreciation

Recognition

#FightInformed

Collaborative working across all types of REPS makes us official.

Let’s only focus on positive changes. There is no such thing as "no job."
**IMPACT**

**Calls for action**

**Put the focus on members**
- Use case studies to give members’ views on how they have benefited from their contact with RCN reps
- Use case studies on reps’ campaigning work on *Scrap the Cap.*

**Put the focus on the workplace**
- Explain and educate about the value and impact of RCN reps in the workplace among managers and employers.

**Sharing ideas about impact**
- Set up an innovation fund for RCN rep changemakers to share their learning/impact or to test out an idea.

*Scrap the cap!*
CELEBRATE

Take every opportunity to celebrate what reps do.

Achievements so far

Developing a community of RCN changemakers

A group of rep ‘changemakers’ have come together to generate positive images and messages about being an RCN rep. Their aim is to change the story of reps from one of struggle and challenge to one of a positive force for change. Their book *The Value of Reps: In Our Own Words* gives a voice to reps who describe what they give as a rep and the personal benefits reaped.

Search for 006238 at www.rcn.org.uk/publications

Inviting every new starter at the RCN to engage with reps

A new slot has been developed about reps for the Onboard two-day RCN induction programme for new staff. This involves a rep and a member of employment relations team talking about the rep roles and their impact, and invites new starters to think about how they might interact with reps and recruit them. New staff will also be given the rep role descriptor pyramid and a copy of *The Value of Reps: In Our Own Words* book.

Rewarding reps nationally

RCN learning reps, safety reps and stewards are eligible to be nominated for our annual rep of the year awards. The winners are presented with their awards at Congress.

Celebrating reps locally

Regional and country staff thank and celebrate their reps in a range of different ways from simple thank you cards at the end of a case or a piece of work well done, to a networking or learning event with refreshments.
Examples of best practice

In our own words – a celebration of excellence

In autumn 2017, a new book recognising the contribution of RCN reps was launched, celebrating their many achievements through their own stories, experiences and pictures.

Divided into two halves, The Value of Reps: In Our Own Words, the book looks at what reps give to members, alongside what they gain out of the role, with many talking about how becoming a rep has changed their own life for the better.

Featuring contributions from almost two dozen stewards, learning and safety reps from all four corners of the UK, it is based on interviews and photographs taken at an event held at the RCN’s headquarters, where group members were invited to become ‘changemakers’, sharing their experiences of what being a rep means to them.

“For me, the book embodies both what we do as reps and why we do it,” says one of the changemakers, Ali Upton, who is a safety rep in the South East. Her friend, London learning rep Carey Johnson says: “It is very exciting to be involved in such a positive piece of work, where all types of reps are collaborating.”

The book highlights the impact reps can have in workplaces, changing working practices and people’s lives for the better, alongside helping to improve patient care. “It shows the positive aspects of being a rep and how to work in partnership with your own organisation,” says Yvonne Lewis, a steward in Yorkshire and the Humber. “The stories are empowering and inspiring. I feel very proud.”

Search for 006238 at www.rcn.org.uk/publications

A range of different ways to say ‘thank you’ – it’s the small things that matter

In December 2017, every RCN rep in Scotland, who had completed the learning and development pathway, received an attractively designed parchment certificate, recognising their commitment and loyal service, and thanking them for their dedication and hard work. “The RCN certificate is so beautifully done and represents so much,” says Val Douglas, RCN steward and safety rep. “I’m sure I’m speaking for many when I say that I’m proud to receive such a meaningful gesture of recognition.”

This one-off keepsake is just one of the ways that RCN regions and countries are celebrating the contribution reps make. Other initiatives include sending personal thank you letters from regional directors in the East Midlands and South East. Meanwhile there is an awards ceremony for reps in the East Midlands attending Congress, which recognises the best branch and the rep who has made the most outstanding contribution.
Calls for action

Promote reps within the RCN
- Promote reps on regional/country web pages and on a dedicated area of the RCN staff intranet using biographies, case studies and success stories.
- Learn from regions and countries how they thank their reps and share the good practice.
- Review the long service awards for reps.
- Celebrate reps through UK and local reps conferences. Raise the profile of conferences, for example, by increasing speaker profiles.

Promote reps within membership
- Publicise rep successes in RCN Bulletin to reach a wider member audience.
- Develop a wider range of case studies of RCN reps making a difference – especially reps who might be currently less visible.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following committees have been instrumental in steering the engagement and developing this framework for action:

- UK Learning Reps’ Committee
- UK Safety Reps’ Committee
- UK Stewards’ Committee
- Trade Union Governance Group

**Value of Reps Project Advisory Group:**

Juliet Adkins, Senior Communications Officer
Sue Antrobus, Senior Lead for Learning and Development
Verity Brown, Senior Marketing Executive
John Bryant, Corporate Communications and Publishing Manager
Jonathan Bowker, Membership Representation and Support Programme Lead
Tracey Budding, Chair Trade Union Governance Group
Alison Goodfield, Activist Support and Development Facilitator/Senior Officer, RCN Wales
Jenny Lillywhite, Rep Support Officer
Patricia Marquis, Regional Director, South East
Rachael McIlroy, Senior Research Lead
Denise McLaughlin, Chair UK Safety Reps’ Committee
Stephen McSherry, Senior Officer, RCN Northern Ireland
Gerry O’Dwyer, National Officer – Team Leader
Mairead O’Siochru, L&D Quality Assurance Improvement Lead
Sharon Palfrey, Activate Editor
Lesley Pallett, UK Safety Reps Committee, South West
Colin Poolman, Senior RCN Officer, RCN Scotland
Graham Revie, Chair UK Stewards’ Committee
Karen Sanders, Chair UK Learning Reps’ Committee
Kimberly Scott, Bulletin Editor
Emily Spencer-Rigby, Lead for Workplace Learning
Kim Sunley, National Officer
Kirsten Wallwork, Team Manager, Customer Services Centre, RCND
Stephanie Wilson, Governance Support Manager

Reps attending the UK Joint Reps’ Conference in September 2016
Eleanor McWilliams, Steward, Northern Ireland
East Midlands Regional Reps’ Group – rep recruitment and retention task and finish group
Members attending at the 2017 Congress fringe event – growing and supporting our rep community

Health Practitioners’ Committee
Forum Chairs’ Committee
Student Committee

South East Region Board
South West Region Board
East Midlands Region Board
Eastern Region Board
North West Region Board
Northern Region Board
Northern Ireland Board
Welsh Board

Reps, members, committees and RCN staff who responded to the Value of Reps engagement and shared their views and ideas.
Employment Relations Team, RCN HQ
Learning and Development Team, Employment Relations Department
Employment Relations Team, RCN Northern Ireland
Operational Managers Group
Member Support Services Team
Professional Learning and Development Facilitator Team
Learning and Organisational Development Team
RCND Staff Support Team
Employment Relations Team, RCN Scotland
Learning and Development Team, RCN Scotland
Derek Browne, RCN Officer, RCN Wales
Sue Bucksey, RCN Officer, RCN South East Region
Katharine Wood, Regional Administrator, RCN Yorkshire and The Humber Region
Clare Laycock, RCN Officer, RCN Yorkshire and The Humber Region
Sue Panther, RCN Officer, RCN Yorkshire and The Humber Region
Mark Platt, Policy Manager, RCN Policy and Public Affairs (UK and International)
Jill Thornton, Health and Wellbeing Manager, HR and Organisational Development

Rachel Wood, Professional Learning and Development Facilitator, London Region
Maria Lewis, RCN Officer – Regional Development, West Midlands Region
Helen Woodward, RCN Customer Service Administrator, Cardiff Gate