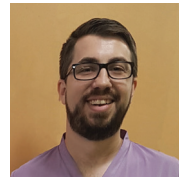


# Working Together



Being active  
on staff side

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This publication has been created by RCN reps and staff, working together to share their experience and expertise for the benefit of the wider rep community.

Special thanks go to Alex Scott, Chukwudubem Ifeajuna, Fern Bale, Gerry O'Dwyer, Gina Holmes, Helen Inskip, Jamie Steele, Julie Williams, Juliet Adkins, Katy Welsh, Lee Fretwell, Lynne Pearce, Maggy Heaton, Mairead O'Siochru, Mitzi Wilson, Phil Noyes and Rachel Morris.

# A warm welcome to this resource

While your training as an RCN rep offers a great grounding in your duties and the various skills you need, many of us find ourselves taking on a role within staff side that is unexpected. As a result, you find yourself learning the job while you're doing it, widening your RCN perspective to take in the views of other unions.

A couple of years ago, a need for more support was identified by those attending a joint reps conference and this document is among the results. As you'll see, it's based very much upon reps and RCN staff working together to pool their expertise and share it more widely.

I think it's an excellent aid for everyone who wants to take on more responsibility, boosting understanding of the consultative and negotiating processes of multi-union work. I hope you agree.

**Phil Noyes,**  
**Chair of**  
**Staff Side at**  
**Coventry and**  
**Warwickshire**  
**Partnership**  
**NHS Trust**



When the staff-side chair of our organisation retired, I put myself forward for the post, and was voted in. As my Trust already has a convener, I thought all I had to do was chair meetings.

But when the head of HR started calling me 'deputy convener' I began to panic. I knew that my RCN training and limited experience just wasn't enough to equip me for this responsible role. At the time, I recall asking if there was any RCN guidance for reps taking on executive roles, but was told that nothing had been published.

This document fills that void. I'm delighted to have been invited to be part of the project team, working with other reps and staff members to pull together our tips and advice in this brilliant resource. I believe it will help reps at whatever stage or position they are on their staff side – including me.

**Mitzi Wilson,**  
**Chair of**  
**Staff Side at**  
**Birmingham**  
**Community**  
**Healthcare**  
**NHS Trust**



# What is Staff Side?

While there is no universally agreed definition of what staff side is, broadly speaking, in the NHS it is the interface between the various unions – and sometimes recognised professional bodies – within an organisation.

Overall, staff side's role is to ensure a collective approach to issues such as terms and conditions of employment, receiving advice and guidance from the various unions and organisations, as appropriate. Alongside the RCN, organisations attending may include the British Medical Association, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, the GMB, the College of Podiatry\*, Unison and Unite.

In practice, staff side operates differently in each organisation, according to its own constitution and terms of reference. This includes how and when its officers, such as chair, are chosen; who is eligible to attend; and how often meetings are held.

The interface between staff side and the organisation's management side happens at the joint consultative negotiating committee – usually known by the acronym JCNC\*\*. In some organisations, these have been replaced with partnership committees. Held regularly, it's here that staff side meets the employer's representatives, feeding back the views of staff, and making sure their voices are heard on a variety of issues.

In addition, staff side will link with other workplace committees looking at health and safety, workforce development or learning. Individual staff side members may attend these committees, feeding in staff side views and reporting back to the broader staff side meetings

\* Formerly known as the Society of Chiropractors and Podiatrists.

\*\* This forum may be called something different in your organisation.

## Outside the NHS

The staff-side model in the independent sector can vary depending on the organisation. Some organisations – particularly larger public sector employers – will have staff-side/trade union side arrangements very similar to the NHS.

In addition, some larger private health care employers have similar structures to staff side, but often lack the written detail to support them, including a constitution.

Wherever you are based, as an RCN rep you may find the top tips on page 14 useful when you are planning to attend staff side – or the equivalent – in your organisation.

## Who can and should attend from the RCN?

Each staff-side constitution will set out who is eligible to attend, with the number of possible participants from each recognised trade union and/or professional body often reflecting local membership figures.

The RCN differs from some other unions in that we have three kinds of reps. While some constitutions specify that only stewards can attend, others specify that all accredited trade union

reps are eligible to attend. **The RCN's position is that a strong staff-side constitution should entitle all types of accredited rep to participate as we believe each kind of rep brings a different contribution.**

- **Learning reps** make sure learning needs are incorporated into discussions about organisational change, policy development and workplace culture.
- **Safety reps** provide data about an employer's performance in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace, ensuring any issues raised are based on evidence.
- **Stewards** highlight members' experiences and concerns about their terms and conditions of employment.

Having all three kinds of reps attending staff-side meetings brings a wealth of different skills and experiences, enriching analysis on the various issues that will be discussed by the group.

To find out more about how your own staff side works in practice, including who can attend, see your organisation's staff-side terms of reference, constitution and/or recognition agreement.

## Offering support and guidance

RCN senior officer Julie Williams of the East Midlands regional office talks about the support she gives reps, alongside what the RCN expects in return.



Every RCN rep has their own local supervising RCN officer, who supports them on a one-to-one basis, including accompanying them to staff-side meetings as necessary, particularly where they are in a staff-side executive role. If reps are inexperienced, or facing some specific challenges where extra support would be useful, I'll attend a meeting with them. But by and large, we feel that if people have been trained well and have some experience, they don't need us to be there.

One of the difficulties that reps may find, especially as newcomers to an executive position, is that you must represent the views of the group and not your individual union. Sometimes they can be the same, but not always, and there can be a tension. As supervising officers, we're there to help support them through that realisation. We can also offer guidance to those who may face difficulties in creating good working relationships with others on staff side.

In their work, we expect all our reps to demonstrate the RCN's values, which are part of their initial training. This includes being inclusive, listening, caring, respectful and professional, alongside being accountable to members. We also ask them to report back on any themes or trends they have identified, for example, any patterns of organisational changes. We encourage reps to take forward our national RCN campaigns to staff side, asking for the group's support.

Although it varies between organisations, there is an expectation that the chief executive, head of HR and a senior nurse, such as the director, will attend partnership or joint negotiating and consultation meetings, alongside others who may come along for specific items — for instance, the director of finance to discuss a financial report. Sometimes they may need to be substituted or can only attend briefly, but it's important that the right people are around the table when issues are being discussed. The staff-side chair or secretary should feel confident to point out if any key employer representatives are missing, requesting their presence if necessary.

Effective partnership working relies upon good communication, openness and honesty, transparency and a willingness to find common ground. Building healthy working relationships and networks are vital, helping you to meet in the middle whenever that's possible, with the focus on finding consensus. No one ever gets everything they want, but you can agree to disagree in a professional manner. Everyone's time and expertise are valuable and each of us needs to respect the position someone holds — whether they're a nurse, the chief executive or a porter.

# What Kind of Staff-Side Rep Are You?

Not sure whether you'd make a good staff-side member, secretary or chair? Our quiz will help you decide.

Please rate each statement from 0 – 5:

0 = never      1 = very occasionally      2 = sometimes  
3 = often      4 = nearly always      5 = always

Statement	Rating
1. I enjoy planning for the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I enjoy bringing people into discussions and making sure everyone's voice is heard	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am curious about how things work	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I like being part of a group	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I am comfortable with agreed responsibilities and timescales	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I like to hear about lots of different opinions on issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I enjoy talking to people and hearing their ideas and views	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I am comfortable with difference or disagreement	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I like to have information to hand to back up what I am saying	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I enjoy presenting information	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I am comfortable dealing with people in senior positions in the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I am interested in the detail behind why things are done in a certain way	<input type="checkbox"/>



13. You will always find me in the kitchen at parties
14. I am comfortable when discussions move to agreed actions
15. I like to respond promptly to enquiries from others
16. I am comfortable presenting to an audience
17. I enjoy feeling that I can make a contribution
18. I plan ways in which others can feel a sense of belonging
19. I can present difficult messages when I am speaking with the support of others
20. Others tell me that I am very reliable
21. I have a good eye for detail
22. I enjoy working on specific projects
23. I am interested in how organisations work and how they plan for the future
24. I like learning from others
25. I believe that systems can support creativity
26. I like feeling plugged in to systems
27. I enjoy looking for where consensus might lie
28. I am a good listener but will speak up if something is not right
29. I like developing others and helping them to realise their potential
30. I enjoy creating order and clarity

## Key

Statement	Score	Statement	Score	Statement	Score
Q2	<input type="text"/>	Q1	<input type="text"/>	Q3	<input type="text"/>
Q6	<input type="text"/>	Q5	<input type="text"/>	Q4	<input type="text"/>
Q8	<input type="text"/>	Q10	<input type="text"/>	Q7	<input type="text"/>
Q11	<input type="text"/>	Q14	<input type="text"/>	Q9	<input type="text"/>
Q12	<input type="text"/>	Q15	<input type="text"/>	Q13	<input type="text"/>
Q16	<input type="text"/>	Q18	<input type="text"/>	Q17	<input type="text"/>
Q19	<input type="text"/>	Q20	<input type="text"/>	Q22	<input type="text"/>
Q23	<input type="text"/>	Q21	<input type="text"/>	Q24	<input type="text"/>
Q27	<input type="text"/>	Q25	<input type="text"/>	Q26	<input type="text"/>
Q29	<input type="text"/>	Q30	<input type="text"/>	Q28	<input type="text"/>
<b>Total (a)</b>	<input type="text"/>	<b>Total (b)</b>	<input type="text"/>	<b>Total (c)</b>	<input type="text"/>

### **Mostly (a) Staff-Side Chair**

A high score here suggests that you are someone who enjoys facilitating discussions and bringing lots of different views into play. You may find that others tend to see you as a natural leader but you are also interested in understanding issues and hearing a range of views. You are confident presenting difficult messages when you have the backing of others. You understand the value of building consensus. These qualities can be very useful in a staff-side chair position.

### **Mostly (b) Staff-Side Secretary**

A high score here suggests that you are someone who likes to ensure that order and processes are in place to support effective delivery of pieces of work. You like to create systems that enable everyone to play their part, seeing their contribution being recognised. You are seen as very reliable and clear thinking, so others come to you for advice. These are all qualities that can be very effective as a staff-side secretary.

### **Mostly (c) Staff-Side Member**

A high score here suggests that you really enjoy talking to other people and finding out their views. You work well as part of a team and enjoy building strong relationships to move work forward. You are not afraid of speaking up, but you also listen carefully to what others are saying. You like to have information to draw on to add to discussions. These qualities are very useful ones to bring to staff-side meetings.

# Getting Started at Staff Side

Planning to attend your first staff-side meeting can be a bit daunting. The role descriptor below and the related illustrative activities should help you to have a clear understanding of your role and what is expected of you.

It is a good idea to spend some time in advance thinking through what

you think you can bring to the meeting and what you would like to get out of it. The top tips on page 14 can help you with your planning. If you know a rep who is already on staff side have a chat with them about what you can expect the meeting to be like.

## ROLE DESCRIPTOR AND ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

### Staff-side Member

1. Work in partnership on agreed joint union strategy and objectives.
  - Work closely with and influence union colleagues to develop agreement on key issues.
  - Access and share data that might be useful to help staff side build an evidence-based picture around key issues.
2. Share your expertise, knowledge and experiences with staff-side colleagues and co-operate with systems to support development and succession planning.
  - Identify opportunities to work alongside or buddy with other staff-side reps.
  - Work on defined time-limited projects for staff side that match your skill set.
3. Actively engage with the development of agreed staff-side messages.
  - Share (with officer support if required) RCN documents or recommendations relevant to areas of staff-side work.
  - Share your intelligence of member views with staff side to support development of a staff-side position and messages.
  - Share information around workplace issues from your representation of members with staff side to help build the local picture.

4. Provide authentic and evidence-based views to support the development of consensus that recognises individuality, fosters positive challenge and promotes equality, diversity and fair process.
  - Treat all members of staff side with respect.
  - Model positive behaviours.
  - Provide healthy challenge.
  - Ask questions of elected staff-side officers or at staff side meetings whenever you identify a new issue or one requiring a re-examination of staff-side actions.\*
5. Engage positively with members to present accurate information around consultations and gather a wide range of views in support of the development of agreed negotiation positions.
  - Find out what is important to RCN members and what they are concerned about.
  - Update RCN members and your officer on the work you are doing on staff side.
6. Co-operate with agreed business processes to support the effective functioning of staff side and the delivery of agreed pieces of work in collaboration with, and in the best interests of, staff.
  - Respond to correspondence from the staff-side chair around meetings and attendance.
  - Engage with minutes of staff-side meetings to ensure these reflect an accurate picture.
  - Provide timely and evidence-based feedback on staff-side consultations.

\* When you are thinking about questions to bring to staff side you may find the RCN's *Ask Listen Act* publication (search for 005357 at [www.rcn.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications)) is a helpful place to start.



## Top tips: What to consider when planning to attend staff side

What is concerning your RCN members? Think about issues members have raised with you that could be affecting other staff. Can you raise a concern that interests some of those present? Start with something that you feel confident in raising and know a lot about.

What are the key issues for your staff-side colleagues? Is there a workplan? If so, identify those issues that are particularly relevant for members and think about what you can contribute.

What makes your contribution unique? What perspectives can you bring that may not be represented by anyone else?

How can you build the strength of your issue? Think about data that might be useful to share with staff-side colleagues.

What do you know that could be useful? What groups do you attend in your workplace? Think about the information they could provide — or what they could benefit from knowing about.

Who do you know who could be helpful? Do you have any good working relationships with managers that could support you on specific issues? Do you have any alliances with other members of staff side who could help highlight issues? How can you forge and foster these useful partnerships?

How do staff-side members behave in meetings? Do meetings take place in a spirit of respect and equity? If not, what can you do to role model more positive behaviours? Who can help you? Identify those who behave in ways that make you feel comfortable, and build on those relationships.

How can you feed back to your members? Think about ways to update your RCN members and local officer, using all your RCN networks.

Remember planning and communication are key. Be prepared, gathering information and members' views in advance.

Make sure your contribution is recorded. Check the minutes when they are circulated.

## Attending staff side for the first time

Chukwudubem (Chuks) Ifeajuna is the only RCN safety rep at Southampton General Hospital, having completed his training in summer 2018.



As a newly accredited RCN safety rep, I've only attended one staff-side meeting so far. It was very interesting meeting everyone around the table, including all of those who are not RCN. I had a good reception and everybody was very welcoming and happy to see me.

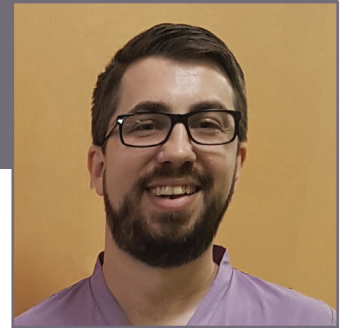
I'm already thinking about a few issues that we need to work on and take forwards. Among them is staff, especially nurses, being frightened of speaking out when things are going wrong. They fear losing their job or facing disciplinary proceedings. I think we need to remind staff that they have a duty of care to patients, so it's about education and sharing experiences.

I think there can also be issues about staff wellbeing and it's important to talk to people about how they are feeling, encouraging them not to hide their emotions. We're there to look after the patients, but we also need to look after ourselves too. I'm hoping to raise these issues at a future staff-side meeting.

I think it's really important that the RCN plays an active part in staff side. Being there will help to me to understand what's happening throughout the Trust, and how I can contribute.

## Working together for the greater good

Jamie Steele is an RCN steward in the Yorkshire & the Humber region.



I applied to become a steward in December 2017, after being highly involved in the RCN's pay campaign. I want to make sure that all staff are treated fairly, helping reach agreements before problems escalate.

While I received the general emails about staff-side's activities, I wouldn't say I knew a great deal about it before I attended — and I'd say that was true of the majority of my colleagues. We have five RCN reps on staff side. I volunteered to attend because I want to be more involved in supporting staff and decision-making.

Before I went along, I didn't know what to expect, but we talked about a lot of issues and I found it interesting to hear different views and see how the various unions and organisations work. I thought the RCN behaved professionally and was very involved in the conversations that took place. Although the unions often have different priorities, I can see good partnerships, with everyone trying to work together for the greater good of all staff. Even though we didn't all agree on everything, it felt like a supportive environment, with everyone's issues heard and discussed respectfully.

I brought up an issue around staffing and the Trust's internal bank. Members had told me that they wouldn't join it because the Trust insisted they must pay for their own Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, even though they are working here already. I gathered some figures about agency costs and it became apparent that the Trust could save a lot of money if they paid this cost for staff, encouraging many more to join the bank. Now it has been picked up and there are moves to get the charge removed. I think it has happened from me speaking up and it's something that benefits everyone — patients, staff and the Trust.

Since I began sitting on staff side, members are bringing issues to me that potentially could be discussed here. Currently I'm raising another of their concerns, which relates to the continuing building work at the hospital. A builder's yard has been sited in the middle of the staff car park, which could cause problems when the evenings grow darker, as staff will have to walk much further to get to their cars. We've already had



some isolated incidents with crime, including violent threats and break-ins, so we need to minimise the risks to our staff.

Personally, I think being on staff side as an RCN rep has given me the confidence to speak out and challenge a bit more. Watching what others do has helped spark ideas of how best to raise topics, doing it in a way that's constructive for everyone. There are professional benefits too. Although I'm a manager, for me this is a new level of speaking to key people. My hope is that I'm seen a positive force to work with, someone who is fair and balances members' needs with those of the Trust.

The RCN is representing one of the largest staff groups, so we need to make certain our voice is heard, not to the detriment of others, but to make sure we're well represented. We must make sure working conditions are right for the nursing team, because this helps to retain staff, making everyone feel happy in their jobs. A happy member of staff is also a productive one.



## Getting active as a staff-side member

Here are some ideas to think about as you prepare to become an active staff-side member. Pick one or two priority areas to build your momentum and confidence. Others can form the basis of your next steps.

Questions to consider	Notes	Action planned
Attending staff side as a staff-side member		
Have you spoken to your officer about attending staff side?		
Are all reps from recognised unions entitled to attend staff-side meetings?		
Who are the current staff-side executive chair and secretary (and any vice positions)? Do you know how to get in touch with them?		
Where does staff side post information about what it's doing?		
How often and where do staff side meet?		
Do you know where to find the facilities agreement for your workplace? And how to apply for time out to attend staff-side meetings?		
Have you accessed information on how your staff side works, for example, terms of reference/constitution?		
Is there an opportunity to shadow someone else for your first staff-side meeting?		
What are the key issues you would like to bring to staff side?		
What information do you have that you could bring to staff side to support the discussion?		
How do you plan to communicate with members before and after meetings to gather their views?		

# Being Active on Staff-Side Executive

As an RCN rep, you may want to take a more leading role on staff side, becoming either secretary or chair. Each organisation has its own way of selecting these positions, including which unions are eligible. Usually each is elected for a set period of time. To find out more, see your organisation's staff-side terms of reference, constitution and/or recognition agreement. Note that in workplaces where

there is a convenor who is paid by the employer, in practice the role of staff side chair may bear more similarity to our description of staff-side secretary.

If you are thinking about moving into a staff-side executive role the role descriptors for secretary and chair in this section will help you to know what is expected of reps in these roles.

## ROLE DESCRIPTOR AND ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

### Staff-Side Secretary

1. Deliver processes that support the development of joint union strategy and agreed objectives.
  - Provide opportunities for staff side to discuss, collaborate and share views promoting discussion on key issues.
  - Agree timetable for activities.
  - Agree responsibilities for action.
2. Foster a culture that supports the development of staff-side members.
  - Support others to build their skills and knowledge.
  - Provide mentorship and shadowing opportunities.
  - Work with wider staff side to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the group.
3. Support the chair in their role as spokesperson/face and voice of staff side.
  - Communicate agreed key messages with clarity through a range of channels.
4. Develop ways of working that support consensus decision-making.
  - Recognise individuality.
  - Foster positive healthy challenge.
  - Support the embedding of equality, diversity and fair process in all activity.
5. Support consultation with staff affected by changes.
  - Co-ordinate joint trade union responses to meet deadlines.
  - Provide opportunities for affected staff to contribute their views.
  - Seek assurance that appropriate consultation and negotiation processes are adhered to.
  - Work collaboratively with chair and staff-side members to ensure that all staff views are heard and considered.
6. Co-ordinate the business processes to support staff-side meetings, agendas and functions.
  - Answer/acknowledge correspondence and communication on key employee issues.
  - Work collaboratively with the chair to facilitate staff-side business as per constitution and terms of reference.
  - Organise meetings for the staff side.

## Trying to find the best way forward

Maggy Heaton is staff-side secretary at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.



I've sat on staff side since 2012 as the lead RCN rep. After a time as chair, I became staff-side secretary in November 2016, when I was elected for two years.

It's important to remember that, as secretary, your role relates to every member of staff — and not just 1,800 RCN members. You're representing everyone, including the executive's decisions. We speak up for staff as they face changes, seeing what managers want to achieve and trying to find the best way forwards, with minimal disruption to people's working lives.

When I first started, I did ask myself whether I'd made the right decision. Then I began to make the secretary role my own and I think that's my best achievement so far. I've learned a lot about how things work, reading between the lines and raising issues when I see them. I make certain I read every single policy, sending my comments to each member of staff side.

On a day-to-day basis my role involves lots of consultations — for example with staff, over any proposed changes to their working practices, and senior managers to discuss what's on their horizon. I also work with Human Resources and managers to make any consultations easier. I take part in various policy groups and meetings on key issues such as staff wellbeing. Nursing staff may also ask for a meeting or drop-in session on a specific issue that is worrying them. My administrative duties include minuting the monthly staff-side meeting, keeping the list of union reps up-to-date and organising the staff-side annual general meeting. My advice to others taking on the role is to make sure you write the minutes as soon as possible afterwards, so it's all still fresh in your mind. You can get quite heated debates, so it's vital to try and capture everything.

Relationships with the other organisations who form staff side are largely very good. It's really important to try to work in partnership. We want the best working conditions for staff — whether they are nurses, porters, or work in the kitchen. It's okay fighting as a lone voice for nurses, but I like the back-up of the rest of the unions too, because if we have that we have a much stronger voice.

## We get things changed for the better

Helen Inskip is staff-side secretary at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust.



I became an RCN steward in 2014, joining staff side immediately as one of our five seats. I had no idea what it would be like. I'd become a rep because of an experience at work, but I hadn't been very active beforehand, so it was all very new to me. I think if you talk to most nursing staff, unless they have been involved in a specific issue, they won't know staff side exists or what it does.

I became staff-side secretary two years ago, standing for election when the previous person retired. I'm very proud that my peers elected me. The RCN should have a strong voice because we represent more than 3,000 members here, of a staff of around 14,000.

Here you are elected for three years, although the Trust only seconds you from your substantive post for the first two. You can stand for re-election at the end of the three years. It's a full-time job — and very different from working on a ward. Before I took up the post, I shadowed the outgoing secretary and that was very useful to see what her average day looked like.

I would say that around half my time is spent representing individual members who are facing difficulties, including disciplinary proceedings, complaints and investigations. I also sit on a lot of different committees, including health and wellbeing, job matching, workforce change, and the car parking permit appeals panel. A lot of this work involves consultations and it can be very time-consuming. At the moment, I also attend a weekly meeting to talk about the implementation of the recent pay award. I try to work 8am-4pm, but it changes week by week and I'm flexible. Sometimes I need to come in early or stay later to see staff who are working night shifts.

Being staff-side secretary is harder than I thought it would be. It's challenging, partly because it's so varied. And it can be quite stressful. You're always conscious that if you get something wrong — such as a policy change — it can affect a lot of people's working lives, so you put a lot of pressure on yourself to make sure you get it right all the time.

At the beginning, I also felt quite isolated. As a nurse working on a ward, and whatever shift you're working, you're always surrounded by colleagues. Here you're in an office on your own. I don't think I realised that your network isn't just the RCN, but your colleagues from other unions, and it takes a while to build those relationships with staff-side members. I wasn't sure who to ask or where to go for support – and you don't know what you don't know sometimes.

But you gain a lot too. It gives you a voice. I speak up and we get things changed for the better. One recent example is the new policy on staff uniforms. Initially, the Trust proposed that nursing staff could only have naturally coloured hair and couldn't wear nose studs. We said no, that's just not right, and as a result it was quite radically altered. To come out of it knowing that you have made a difference gives you a good sense of wellbeing.

As staff-side secretary, you're negotiating at a high level, talking to directors and senior managers. At first it can be daunting, but you get over that quite quickly. I always make sure that I do my research before any meetings, reading all the papers, so I don't go into anything unprepared.

Although the other staff-side officers are from different unions, fortunately we work well together as a team, supporting each other. For example, if we have queries about how a policy might be applied in practice, we will ask each other.

I'd never anticipated in a million years that this is the direction my career would have taken. Although I miss direct contact with patients, I feel that the job I'm now doing is for them in some ways. If you support your staff, and get the best from them, then patients get the best too.



## Getting active as a staff-side secretary

Here are some ideas to think about as you prepare to become an active staff-side secretary. Pick one or two priority areas to build your momentum and confidence. Others can form the basis of your next steps.

Questions to consider	Notes	Action planned
Being an effective staff-side secretary		
Is there an agreed annual programme of staff-side meeting dates, including an AGM?		
Does the planned timetable meet the requirements set out in the staff-side terms of reference/constitution?		
Are the minutes of staff-side meetings circulated to, and agreed by, staff-side members?		
Do minutes capture key actions points and responsibilities?		
Are key messages agreed by staff side for wider communication?		
Are new members of staff side welcomed and included?		
Are records kept out of correspondence with, and on behalf of, staff side?		
Are you checking in with your regional office and accessing support as appropriate?		



## ROLE DESCRIPTOR AND ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

### Staff-Side Chair

1. Provide joint union strategic and operational leadership.
  - Ensure robust constitution, terms of reference and facilities agreement are in place for staff side and are reviewed regularly.
  - Motivate and encourage engagement and contribution from across all staff-side organisations.
  - Role model high standards of accountability, including an expectation that all staff-side members collect evidence of their activity to demonstrate the value of organisational investment in facilities time.
2. Develop a shared expertise across staff side.
  - Support others to build their skills and knowledge.
  - Provide mentorship and shadowing opportunities.
  - Work with wider staff side to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the group.
3. Act as a spokesperson/face and voice of staff side.
  - Deliver, where agreed, the staff-side view ensuring all opinions are reflected fairly.
  - Engage with regional/full-time union officials.
  - Communicate with wider staff side, management and the workforce
- informing them of all relevant staff-side activity and work.
- Meet regularly with the lead nurse and relevant directors of the organisation.
4. Build cohesion and inclusivity amongst accredited reps across the organisation.
  - Ensure recognition of individuality.
  - Model positive healthy challenge.
  - Ensure equality, diversity and fair process are embedded in all activity.
5. Provide a diverse partnership culture to facilitate meaningful consultation with and negotiation on behalf of the wider workforce.
  - Engage with key stakeholders.
  - Network with other trade unions and professional bodies.
  - Ensure appropriate consultation and negotiation processes are adhered to.
  - Act in employees' best interest by ensuring all staff views are considered and heard.
6. Ensure staff-side business is carried out effectively.
  - Ensure collaboration across staff side including effective chairing of meetings.
  - Work collaboratively with the staff side secretary to facilitate staff-side business as per constitution and terms of reference.

## Giving everyone the chance to speak

Mitzi Wilson is chair of staff side at Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust.



Being a chair is not just about taking charge at meetings. You need to know what's going on in your organisation. At the beginning I shadowed our convenor, who gave me a lot of insight into what was being discussed. Initially I felt quite daunted about taking on an executive role, but my local RCN officer came along with me, giving me some useful pointers.

Every union around the table has their own agenda, but as chair, it's your responsibility to make sure everyone has the chance to speak. The RCN brings a professional side to the discussions, making sure that nursing's voice is heard.

To establish a good partnership culture, you have to put yourself forward and explain what you're trying to achieve. For example, I took the RCN's *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* campaign to staff side, explaining what we were doing. It gives people the opportunity to understand where we're coming from.

The issues that are brought to staff side vary. For example, they might include introducing or reviewing policies, or proposing new initiatives. It's always interesting to know the direction the organisation is trying to take, and sometimes staff side can have an input from the very beginning, helping to prevent issues further along the line.

Since I've been chair, I've become more confident. I've attended different forums that I would usually shy away from, making the most of opportunities that otherwise wouldn't have come my way. It broadens your understanding, so you feel you can join in more. I'm not a naturally confident person, so I push myself. I try to get as much information as I can beforehand and gradually your knowledge expands. By learning more about the organisation, you can work better with most members and managers.



To see the full version of Mitzi's story please see the short film available on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/2yWk66D>

## Chairing by consent

**Phil Noyes is chair of staff side at Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust.**



I'd always had an interest in playing a more active part in staff side and, as a member of the committee, I was very vocal. After I was elected, how much I needed to know was an eye-opener. Initially, I found learning about finance very hard, but I had great support. It's a terrific learning opportunity and I know so much more about corners of my organisation and how things work in the real world, delving into the detail of some interesting but thorny issues.

Being chair can be difficult, particularly when there's a decision that nobody wants to make, or there is a minority who don't support the majority's clear view. As chair, you need to give people the space to speak their difference. Being able to give a dissenting opinion is part of our constitution. Generally, I think the test is being able to disagree in a civil way. I've been very fortunate with my staff-side colleagues as we've had some real differences of opinion, but we've always kept talking.

Part of my role is being amenable to direction. Colleagues always come to a meeting wanting to say something, so you need to give them license, but in a controlled way. I've always felt that you chair by consent. If people don't think you listen to them, it makes your job very difficult. They want to be heard, taken seriously and given plenty of time when they have something important to say. Once you've demonstrated you understand, you're in a good position to achieve whatever reasonable outcome is possible.

I like introducing new people to staff side and the way the organisation works, spending time with them both before and after a meeting, so they can ask questions about what happened and why. I also like developing others to take a leading role.

It's important to celebrate what we do well. I'm proud of how my colleagues have handled consultations with members and it's been a pleasure supporting some of the moral stands that people have taken, when we've firmly said this isn't right and needs to be acted upon.

Among the most challenging times are when we get it wrong. Of course, you don't ever want it to happen, but we're all human so it's inevitable. You may miss something in a consultation, or see it but not realise it could become an issue further down the track. I've had instances when people have been disadvantaged because we failed to notice something and I've felt terrible. You need to admit it's gone wrong, but then focus on stopping it from ever happening again.

Overall, I'd say that being chair is the best role I've ever had and I've really enjoyed it. I think it's important work — and it's important to do it well.



To see the full version of Phil's story please see the short film available on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/2zsR9yC>



## Getting active as a staff-side chair

Here are some ideas to think about as you prepare to become an active staff-side chair. Pick one or two priority areas to build your momentum and confidence. Others can form the basis of your next steps.

Questions to consider	Notes	Action planned
Being an effective staff-side chair		
Is the staff-side constitution/terms of reference/recognition agreement up to date?		
Do the above documents accurately reflect the way that staff side operates?		
Is your workplace partnership agreement (or equivalent) up to date?		
Are all recognised unions represented at staff side?		
Do all staff-side trade unions contribute to staff-side work/discussions?		
How do you communicate staff-side messages within and beyond the organisation where appropriate?		
Do you have a page on the organisational intranet for staff-side information/news?		
Are you accessing support from your officer to discuss and plan your activity?		

## Facing difficulties and making progress

Gina Holmes became chair of staff side at Doncaster and Bassetlaw teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation in 2016.



When I stood for election as chair, it was with the idea that staff side would become stronger and there would be better communication, but I hadn't realised just how fractured staff side was and what a difficult task I was facing.

Six months into the job, having persuaded managers to begin to consult us at an early stage on important staffing issues, a grievance was lodged against me by two staff-side colleagues, on the grounds that I was meeting management alone. Initially I was very upset, but I sought support from my RCN supervising officer, who helped me prepare a statement detailing my side of the story. Following interventions from other staff-side members, the grievance was withdrawn.

I had only been an RCN rep for a short while before I became chair and I really didn't know much about what staff side did before then. Although I've always had excellent support from my RCN officer, I was growing increasingly frustrated with the poor state of relationships between staff side and managers.

I felt like I was drowning and didn't have a clue what to do. There is so much new to learn. Even the terminology was confusing and I hadn't realised how different it was, depending on who you were speaking with. I'd also not anticipated how much hard work was entailed in being the chair, especially trying to bring everyone together and make them work as one. As chair, you're dealing with issues that affect other members of staff, not just nurses, and I knew I needed to be more aware.

It had been a big shock to my system and I was desperately looking for something that could help me. The RCN suggested a buddy scheme with another chair, and I was paired with Phil Noyes. I don't think I could have got through without his support and advice. In practice, it's very informal and he is on the end of the phone when I need help, suggesting different ideas. He's a sounding board, sees things from a different perspective to me and has a lot of experience, plus he makes me laugh too. I've learnt so much and I don't get so stressed about things now.

One piece of advice that has been pivotal in changing relationships, was when Phil encouraged me to praise staff-side colleagues, after they worked well on a particular issue. I sent everyone a letter telling them how proud I was, seeing them come together to deliver their message as a united front. The response back was really positive.

Today, while there is still progress to be made, now staff-side members are saying that the relationship they have with HR is the best it's ever been. I'm also enjoying supporting other reps who are new to the role.

We may be different unions, who work differently, but we have the same goals. Does it really matter how we get there, as long as it's together and in one piece? We get more done and are stronger when we work as one.

Whatever position you hold on staff side, it's important to develop your leadership skills. "In the workplace, leadership is the art of getting things done through other people," says the internationally renowned psychologist and leading authority on emotional intelligence, Daniel Goleman. He adds: "Leadership can be widely distributed within an organisation – most everyone leads at sometime or other, if not all the time. And it's highly situational: anyone might step forward to lead, given the right circumstances."

Goleman's work includes identifying six leadership styles:

- **Commanding** – do what I tell you
- **Democratic** – what do you think
- **Visionary** – come with me
- **Pacesetter** – do as I do now
- **Affiliative** – people come first
- **Coaching** – try this.

All can be applicable in different situations. This quick quiz will help you identify which leadership styles you're naturally good at – and those you may need to develop further <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ls/index.php/325444>

You may also find the Nolan principles useful. These are seven ethical standards expected of those who hold public office and include having integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and honesty.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>

# Contributing to a Healthy and Effective Staff Side

Working as a member, secretary or chair of staff side provides a variety of opportunities for RCN reps to make a difference. Here are some ideas, with RCN reps sharing their achievements.

## Finding common ground

Alex Scott was an RCN steward at Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.



Here, rather than seeing unions as adversaries, the organisation appreciates they are partners, working together to highlight where we need to change. Negotiating can mean having challenging conversations sometimes. But we have great examples of what we've been able to achieve — our learning partnership agreement, our living wage and the support for the RCN's *Healthy Workplace, Healthy You* initiative – all of which demonstrate the value the Trust places on its staff.



## Working together to achieve a shared learning agreement

Katy Welsh is an RCN learning rep at Devon Partnership NHS Trust, which provides mental health and learning disability services.



For our learning agreement, initially I put a proposal to the joint consultative negotiating committee (JCNC), outlining the benefits for both staff and the Trust. The idea came from my learning rep training, when I decided that one of my actions would be to get an agreement in place. The aim is to look at training needs for all groups of staff at every level across the organisation, including mandatory training.

Results from the staff survey suggested that staff wanted more learning and development, with exit interviews showing that people were leaving because they felt there was a lack of opportunities. We were able to use this as a lever to say if the organisation wanted to recruit and retain more staff, we needed to look at how learning and development could support this. I knew that it couldn't just be the RCN asking for this on our own — it had to be sign-up from all the unions. There is strength in numbers.

I drafted an initial framework, based on guidance from the RCN. There were a few changes, which have ensured that it feels like it's a shared agreement. Senior managers have signed up to it and one of the spin-offs is the setting up of a learning advisory committee, chaired by the director of nursing.

This forum helps us pinpoint where any difficulties may be happening locally. We pool intelligence and also make sure that every directorate has its fair share of the budget, with clear governance arrangements in place. Working with other unions who are TUC-affiliated gives access to their training packages, sharing tools and resources for the benefit of all staff.

In a nutshell, our agreement and the committee make sure there is access available for CPD opportunities, raising staff awareness of what exists. It also keeps learning and development on the Trust's agenda, especially as training budgets can often be the first to be cut when finances are tight.

## Improving engagement and rebuilding trust

RCN steward Lee Fretwell is an assistant practitioner in dementia care and chair of staff side at Derbyshire Healthcare Foundation NHS Trust.



Following a high-profile employment tribunal, various expert bodies investigated the Trust, including the Care Quality Commission (CQC), which issued a warning notice, saying the Trust must improve. Their report highlighted a lot of concerns, including a lack of robust leadership, failure to recognise serious safeguarding issues, and variable clinical services. Staff surveys also showed extremely low morale and widespread unhappiness.

As staff-side chair, I felt I was in a position to help make a real difference. It was never going to be easy, but I began by bringing a very fragmented staff side together, so we could work as a united front to bring our members' concerns to the fore, rather than pulling in different directions.

At the same time, I challenged an unwillingness to consult staff, persuading the organisation's leaders of the benefits of working in partnership. This involved networking with senior leaders, explaining how all sides could work together for the common good. I also sought invitations to key meetings and committees, meeting regularly with the Trust's HR director and others.

Among the tangible results is a monthly meeting, chaired by me, with the Trust's engagement lead, demonstrating a commitment to improving the historically poor levels of engagement with staff. Trust is being rebuilt on both sides, leading to much more consultation. There is also increased respect for the RCN, especially our role in driving forward changes for the better.

Personally, I've had to be extremely persistent in knocking on doors and saying our voice must be heard. But we've rebuilt bridges that had been burned — and now the organisation wants to engage with us.

## Shaping care across the county

Rachel Morris is former chair of Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust's staff side.



Two years ago, our staff side realised that sustainability and transformation partnerships (STPs) were on the horizon, yet we knew very little about them. We thought it would be really useful to bring all five local staff sides together across the county, so we could talk to each other and pool knowledge. It's worked so well that the group continues to meet regularly.

We deliberately kept the meetings relatively informal and primarily as a forum to share information. Usually chairs and secretaries of each staff side come along, although other members attend sometimes too. The benefits are brilliant because you know exactly what's happening in other organisations, often very quickly. It's especially useful when changes are proposed that may impact across the whole of health and social care. It's very powerful.

Initially it was hard to bring people together, as there were levels of mistrust and suspicion between the various groups. But at the very first meeting, we stressed that we all had the same common purpose — to protect health and social care, speaking up for the interests of patients and members.

By taking part, we've been able to help shape care across the county, influencing change while it's happening rather than once decisions have been made. We are at the forefront, rather than dragging our heels behind, ensuring that services are fit for purpose and never compromise patient safety.

## Building an effective staff side

As a staff-side member in any role you contribute to the effective running of the group. Building an effective and healthy staff side can mean that you need to take time out from the normal business of the meetings to consider how you work together and what supports you in your work as a group.



### Activity: Developing an active staff side

Think about holding a development day, where staff-side reps can come together to build a shared sense of purpose and commitment.

Use the resources on the following pages to help your staff-side members look at different issues.

For example:

- reviewing your current terms of reference and constitution
- identifying key individuals to influence on specific staff-side objectives
- planning how to develop and communicate important messages.

Additionally, the following questions, designed to help you think about what makes an effective staff side, may provide a useful structure for group discussions.



**Here are some ideas to think about as you prepare to build a healthy and effective staff side. Pick one or two priority areas to build your momentum and confidence. Others can form the basis of your next steps.**

Questions to consider	Notes	Action planned
Building a healthy staff side		
Is there clarity on who attends partnership forum meetings with the employer on behalf of staff side?		
Is there a staff-side influencing plan that identifies key internal and external stakeholders?		
Do regional officers from staff-side trade unions engage constructively with the work of staff side?		
Do staff-side members treat one another with respect?		
Is there a staff-side development plan?		
Do a variety of staff-side members contribute to sub groups/working parties in line with their abilities/roles?		
Do all staff-side members work to build consensus and find common ground?		
Are you keeping your regional office informed about what is happening on staff side?		

# Useful resources

## Checklist for drafting/reviewing staff-side constitution, structure and ways of working

Points covered	Y/N	Comments/action
<b>Staff-side mandate</b>		
1. Is there an underlying principle or mission statement to inform the staff-side constitution?		
2. Are clear terms of reference stated?		
3. Are the duties of staff-side elected roles clearly described?		
4. Is it clear who can call emergency meetings?		
5. How do you change the constitution? Who can initiate this?		
<b>Staff-side structure</b>		
6. Who are the members of your staff side? (Learning reps/safety reps/stewards accredited to the trust?)		
7. Is there a stated quorum for meetings?		
8. What part can regional officers of unions take in meetings?		
9. What elected roles are on staff side? (For example, chair, vice chair, convenor, secretary, job evaluation (JE) consistency lead.)		
10. When do you elect these roles and what is their term of office? (AGM?)		
11. Are there restrictions on who can be nominated for election? (For example, JE lead must be a trained JE panellist.)		

<p>12. Are medical negotiating body colleagues involved at JCNC? How are matters of joint interest handled where a decision is required? (Policy, change process etc. though Agenda for Change and medical terms and conditions matters will be negotiated separately.)</p>		
<p><b>Staff-side ways of working</b></p>		
<p>13. How often do you meet and when do you get papers?</p>		
<p>14. Do you have rules on how elections are conducted? Who enforces these?</p>		
<p>15. Do you have agreed facilities time for any of these roles? Who agrees these?</p>		
<p>16. How do staff side make decisions? (This may vary depending on the matter concerned: for example, decisions changing contractual matters for the entire workforce will be the most rigorous process.)</p>		
<p>17. Do you have any rules to create a balance of voting which reflects the size of unions? Who checks size? Is size important?</p>		
<p>18. Do you have provision for postal ballots on key decisions?</p>		
<p>19. How do you handle minority views? (When one union objects to a decision but the vote was in favour, what can they do to show that?)</p>		
<p>20. How do you meet with managers? (JCNC/JNC/partnership forum.)</p>		
<p>21. What are the rules for these meetings and who sets them? (For example, recognition agreement, which regional officers will negotiate)</p>		

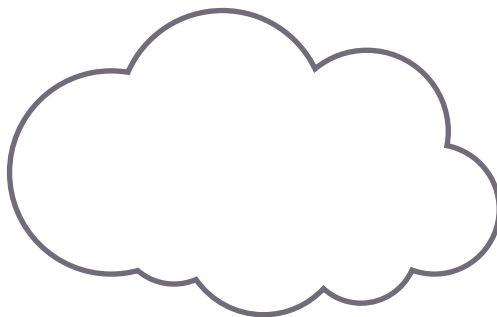
22. How do you handle misconduct in office by any occupant of a role?		
23. Is there a mechanism for removing someone from a role and who can initiate this?		
24. How do you consult the workforce when negotiating on matters related to terms and conditions?		
Notes		





### **Activity: Developing your staff-side influencing plan**

1. Write your agreed staff-side aim in the cloud below.
2. Outside the cloud position the individuals you have identified as having a potential impact on your work
  - Short line to the cloud – very engaged.  
Long line to the cloud – disengaged
  - Red line – negative influence.  
Green line – positive influence
  - Thick line – powerful/influential.  
Thin line – not powerful/influential





## Developing a staff-side plan template

Treats/risks identified	Mitigations/common ground/ opportunities	Planned action (where appropriate)
What can you see that might get in the way of staff side being a strong and effective team?	What do you have in place to offset that threat? What common ground have you identified? Who can support you?	What else do you need to do to turn the identified risk into a positive or to reduce the potential harm?



### Activity: Developing your staff-side message

Use the template below to help you to develop a staff-side message around a specific issue that you want to communicate about.

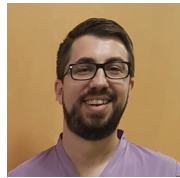
Issue	Your plan
Who is the message from and whom do you want to reach?	
What is happening/what do you want your audience to know?	
When is the message relevant for? Is there a deadline?	
Where does the message relate to?	
Why are you communicating this message?	
How do you plan to get this message out?	

# Notes

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