Improving Continuing Professional Development: How reps can make a difference in the workplace
Contents

1. Introduction ...........................................................................................................................................4
2. What is continuing professional development (CPD)? ...........................................................5
3. Why is CPD so important? .............................................................................................................7
4. How is learning managed within different organisations? .....................................................10
5. What are the key challenges? .......................................................................................................12
6. What about bank and agency staff? ............................................................................................14
7. Enabling individuals to confidently negotiate CPD ...............................................................15
8. How can RCN learning reps work in partnership to improve CPD opportunities? ........17
9. What would a positive learning culture look like in your organisation? ........................................18
10. Further resources .........................................................................................................................22
11. References ......................................................................................................................................30
1. Introduction

The nursing profession needs to stay up to date with the latest developments, continuing to update their skills and competences to meet changing future population health needs effectively and safely. However, the reality is that nurses are reporting difficulty accessing and completing continuing professional development (CPD) in all settings. In 2018 the RCN published *Investing in a Safe and Effective Workforce: Continuing Professional Development for Nurses in the UK*. This powerful policy report outlines the importance of CPD, current access to CPD, and the RCN’s call to action for the Government. It is essential reading for all reps who want to get active around this issue.

Following its publication, the UK Learning Representatives’ Committee, with the support of the Education Forum, held a Congress event to understand what further support reps may need to enable them to help to improve CPD access and provision at a local level. This resource has been developed using the views, experience and ideas from those attending.

Aims and intended learning outcomes

This resource aims to provide RCN reps with the knowledge and resources you need to help create a positive culture around CPD in the workplace. After completing the activities, you should be able to:

- articulate the value and importance of CPD to staff and employers, particularly its relationship to delivering high quality care
- signpost staff to RCN resources and learning opportunities
- identify any local challenges and barriers
- work in partnership with employers and learning providers to improve provision and engagement.

Relevance to your role descriptor

You can expect to apply a wide variety of your knowledge and skills, but particularly those relating to the ‘signposting’ and ‘questioning and influencing’ elements of your role.
2. What is continuing professional development (CPD)?

While there is no universally agreed definition of CPD, there is a broad consensus that, in a nursing context, its main purpose is to help staff to maintain and develop the skills they need to deliver high quality, safe and effective care across all roles and settings.

Examples of CPD include:

- reading and reviewing publications
- attending workshops or conferences
- undertaking research
- distance learning and webinars
- mandatory training directly relevant to a nurse’s specialty
- taking part in clinical audits
- college or university level education or training
- practice visits to different environments
- shadowing or secondments
- structured clinical supervision
- peer review activities
- coaching or mentoring others, or being coached and mentored.

CPD is additional to any mandatory or statutory training that an organisation may provide. Mandatory and statutory training is undertaken by all staff and is deemed essential for safe and efficient service delivery and personal safety. It reduces organisational risks and ensures organisations are meeting their legislative duties. See our companion booklet Improving Mandatory Training: How Reps Can Play Their Part.

The fact that CPD is additional to mandatory or statutory training in no way reduces its value or importance, which we will discuss in the next section.
Activity:

Think about the kinds of CPD activities that are provided or encouraged in your workplace (not including mandatory or statutory training). Are there opportunities for all nursing staff?
3. Why is CPD so important?

CPD is important for all nursing staff in all settings, including the independent and third sectors. Everyone should be given the opportunity to access learning, whether to develop their nursing career, or remain in their current role and be the best they can be. All staff should have confidence that their knowledge and skills are up to date.

There is international evidence that CPD is vitally important for nursing staff in terms of their professional and personal development and in contributing to improved patient outcomes and increased public confidence. The RCN also believes it has an important role in creating a healthier and happier workplace, citing strong links between learning and wellbeing. Developing the skills of staff members can improve productivity, encourage retention and inspire innovation.

For registered nurses, in 1995, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) introduced a minimum requirement of 35 hours of CPD over three years in order for nurses to be able to remain on the register. In April 2016, revalidation was introduced. This requires nurses to continue to undertake at least 35 hours CPD over three years, but at least 20 hours of this must be in participation with other learners — for example, attending seminars, shadowing colleagues and taking part in learning workshops. Nurses should also be able to provide evidence of learning outcomes directly relevant to their specialty, recording them in a portfolio.

http://revalidation.nmc.org.uk/what-you-need-to-do/continuing-professional-development

Although there is no formal UK requirement, the RCN works in all four countries to ensure CPD is available for health care assistants (HCAs), associate practitioners (APs), and trainee nursing associates (TNAs). There is a useful web page that outlines the UK codes, standards and country specific information.

https://www.rcn.org.uk/HCA-AP-TNA
Meeting regulatory standards

In England, the Care Quality Commission refers to The Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014, stating that “Staff must receive the support, training, professional development, supervision and appraisals that are necessary for them to carry out their role and responsibilities. They should be supported to obtain further qualifications and provide evidence, where required, to the appropriate regulator to show that they meet the professional standards needed to continue to practise”.

www.cqc.org.uk

In Wales, both the Health and Care Standards for the NHS, and the National Minimum Standards for Independent Health Care Services set out clearly that staff that participate in CPD, keep up to date professionally and have an annual appraisal and development plan. This is regulated by Health Inspectorate Wales.

www.hiw.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, the Quality Standards for Health and Social Care say that an organisation needs to have “sound human resource policies and systems in place to ensure appropriate workforce planning, skill mix, recruitment, induction, training and development opportunities for staff to undertake the roles and responsibilities required by their job”. They do not specifically refer to non-mandatory training, but they do acknowledge the need for an organisation to meet “professional and other codes of practice” which would include NMC revalidation. This is regulated by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (Northern Ireland).

www.rqia.uk

In Scotland, the Health and Social Care Standards — which are written from a patient or client perspective — do not specifically refer to learning outside of mandatory training, but they say “I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes.” In Scotland, this is regulated by the Care Inspectorate.

www.careinspectorate.com
Activity:

Think about the various reasons why CPD is so important for nursing staff. Ask your colleagues what matters to them, and the difference it makes to their working lives.
4. How is learning managed within different organisations?

Whether part of the NHS or outside it, each organisation should have a policy that sets out their commitment to training and includes information about study leave and funding.

Access to CPD for nursing staff will be managed differently in each organisation. Here are some of the job titles you may encounter:

- **Clinical practice educators** – provide education and training for specific groups of staff.
- **Education facilitators** – plan, co-ordinate and deliver education programmes for groups of nursing staff, alongside delivering clinical care themselves. These can often be planned and delivered as inter-professional multi-disciplinary teams.
- **Learning and development managers** – design, develop, record and monitor a comprehensive range of learning opportunities, alongside guiding and supporting the training needs of all staff, including nursing.
- **Practice development practitioners** – educate and train specific teams, sometimes carrying out research.
- **Practice nurse facilitators** – support nursing staff based within general practices with their CPD, highlighting any opportunities.
- **Professional development advisers** – guide and support staff in their choice of appropriate CPD.
- **Link lecturers** – although primarily associated with nursing students, link lecturers provide information and support regarding CPD opportunities within a higher education context.
Activity:

Think about how CPD is managed in your organisation:

- Have you read your training/study leave policy?
- Who manages CPD? Is there someone with a specific role or is it left to individuals or team leaders?
- How are budgets allocated? Is it by team, department, individual or band?
- Ask your colleagues if it feels fair — and whether they would like to see changes.
5. What are the key challenges?

For many nursing staff, opportunities to access CPD can be a mixed picture. Here are some of the common barriers.

Lack of funding

In England, funding for CPD has been cut dramatically. Health Education England’s budget for ‘workforce development’ – largely used for CPD for nurses — reduced by 60% over the last two years — from £205 million in 2015-16 to £83 million in 2017-18. Without investment in CPD, many nursing staff feel they are unable to progress in their careers. In the RCN’s staff survey, published in 2017, one Band 5 nurse described nursing as a ‘dead end career’ because there was no funding for training and development. As responsibility for undertaking CPD is formally the responsibility of the individual nurse, in reality, a large percentage of nurses feel compelled to fund their own.
Being unable to take time off
The RCN’s employment survey of 2017 reported that around a quarter of NHS respondents, and one in five of those working in the independent sector, were unable to take time off for training. Within the NHS, a higher proportion of those working on hospital wards cited time as a factor in limiting their opportunities. As one staff nurse said, ‘the ward is constantly short-staffed and this means there is no time to release staff for training’. Anecdotally, other staff report having training days cancelled because of staff shortages. While there is no legal requirement for employers to provide time for CPD-related learning, the NMC says that they have a responsibility to support their staff to meet their CPD requirements.

Little professional support and guidance
While some organisations clearly value the learning and development of their nursing staff, others have yet to develop this kind of culture, leaving staff feeling unsupported. In practice, this may mean no protected time for CPD; scant funding; and little discussion of any opportunities available, with nursing staff left largely to find and fund their own way. As one of the contributors to the Congress event said: ‘My organisation does not allocate anything for CPD. You have to arrange it by yourself and be sure that there will be no shortage of staff when you attend.’

Other barriers
These may include:

- a lack of access to IT or knowledge of how to use it effectively
- shift patterns that make accessing learning complex
- difficulties sourcing what is available and appropriate
- a lack of clarity around how any funding is allocated.
6. What about bank and agency staff?

The RCN’s employment survey highlighted that staff working in these settings are much more likely than others to have to complete even mandatory training in their own time, with 83% reporting this — compared to 54% of all nursing staff who said it happened during their normal working hours.

The RCN’s *Healthy Workplace Toolkit for an Agency Workforce* recommends that agency employers should provide regular feedback and appraisals to identify any gaps in knowledge, alongside supporting nurses to meet the NMC’s CPD standards for revalidation. Host organisations should open up work-based training and updates, and provide performance feedback to agency staff.

**Activity:**

- What are the barriers to learning and development in your workplace?
- What would help staff to overcome them?
7. Enabling individuals to confidently negotiate CPD

Being a learning rep is about enabling others and building their confidence to manage their own learning. It’s not about doing it all for them!

You’ll now be aware of how CPD is managed and supported in your organisation, and that will help you to support members to identify some achievable opportunities for CPD. It’s helpful to keep up to date with learning opportunities that are relevant to the service you provide and the career pathways that are available. We’ve given some starting points in our useful resources section at the end.

Also share information and experiences at RCN branch meetings, working together to shape plans to promote and protect learning in your workplace.
Top ten tips to secure your CPD*

1. **Be clear.** Say exactly what you want and why you need it.

2. **Be positive.** Explain how the training you’ve requested will fit into organisational priorities and will have a positive impact on patient care.

3. **Think outside the box.** Thinking creatively about solutions will help. You don’t always need to complete a formal training course to get the development you need. Consider online training, appropriate reading and shadowing.

4. **Refer to your appraisal.** If training was discussed and agreed in your appraisal, make sure you say this when you make your request.

5. **Remember revalidation.** If you’re on the NMC register, explain why CPD is essential for your revalidation.

6. **Make things easier for your manager.** Everyone is busy. If your manager has less to do, they may be more willing to agree to your request, so get as much in place as you can before you speak to them.

7. **Be flexible and don’t give up.** If you can’t get the training when you first apply, think about how else you could do it. There might not be funding for a course at the time of asking, but could you shadow a professional in the area before you apply again?

8. **Be prepared to source your own funding.** Funding isn’t always easy to source, but there are still opportunities out there. Consider applying to the RCN Foundation. Their scholarships and bursaries fund a wide variety of learning and development opportunities.

9. **Remember why you’re requesting CPD.** Without it you’re at risk of falling behind with the latest developments in practice, with patient safety at risk as a consequence.

10. **Use the RCN library.** It’s a huge source of free information. You can access thousands of e-journals and e-books as well as a wide range of nursing and health care databases from your home or mobile phone. Visit https://www.rcn.org.uk/library/support/library-services-from-home

(* reproduced courtesy of RCN Bulletin)
8. How can RCN learning reps work in partnership to improve CPD opportunities?

Whether working in the NHS or the independent sector, RCN learning reps can play a key role in developing learning agreements with employers. These can help to:

• foster a culture of learning and development within the organisation, demonstrating the value that employers place on CPD
• make sure there is protected time for staff to undertake CPD
• offer nursing staff professional support and guidance to choose the most appropriate CPD for their personal and professional development, their role and the organisation’s needs
• ensure that there is funding for CPD and that it is allocated fairly and transparently
• promote a variety of different forms of CPD, highlighting opportunities suitable for nursing staff at all levels.
9. What would a positive learning culture look like in your organisation?

RCN learning rep Katy Welsh explains how she helped to gain support for a learning agreement at Devon Partnership NHS Trust.

The idea came from my learning rep training, when I decided that one of my actions would be to get a learning agreement in place. The aim is to look at training needs for all groups of staff across the whole organisation, including mandatory training and needs analysis.

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 improve its recruitment and retention, we needed to look at learning and development.

I drafted an initial framework, based on guidance from the RCN. The agreement outlines the crucial role played by union learning representatives, who are recognised as active partners in promoting and supporting aspirations for learning across the organisation.

Senior managers have signed up to it and one of the spin-offs is the setting up of a learning advisory committee, which is responsible for introducing, implementing and monitoring a variety of learning initiatives. By sharing intelligence, it helps us pinpoint where any difficulties may be locally. We also make sure that every directorate has its fair share of the budget, with clear governance arrangements in place.

If you’re not careful, a learning agreement can become a dusty document that sits on a shelf. What’s more useful are the actions that
come from it and the difference these make in moving things forward. Our committee has been the biggest catalyst for change, encouraging a culture of learning within our organisation.

For me, the components of a successful learning agreement include:

- Sign-up from every union.
- Public backing from senior managers.
- Clearly laid out aims and objectives.
- A committee that scrutinises learning and development, which includes representatives from all the unions involved and every directorate, and has a 12-month long agreed action plan.

In a nutshell, our agreement and the committee make sure there is equal access 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.

Christine Green is a senior staff nurse at BMI Healthcare in Bath and an RCN learning rep, becoming chair of the RCN’s Bath branch two years ago.

My line manager encouraged me to become an RCN learning rep about five years ago, as she very much prioritised the development of her staff and thought that this role would be helpful. Professional development is about enhancing your role, making sure that you are continually updating your skills and growing more confident in your practice, as you help to deliver better care.

As a learning rep, I started by organising local learning events, including asking consultants to give talks on different aspects of practice, and inviting RCN regional officers to host drop-in sessions on revalidation — which was very popular, helping to alleviate anxieties. As branch chair, I also organise learning events open to members
throughout the Bath area, held in different venues and often in response to what members tell me they would like, involving them in the planning. Over time, these learning opportunities have built up and the support has always been there.

It’s important for the RCN to be involved and lead these local initiatives because they inform staff about the wealth of different resources we provide for professional development. For example, on revalidation I can signpost staff to free RCN events or highlight the RCN’s library, which gives access to research articles, alongside specific online support, such as First Steps for health care assistants. We also point people in the direction of other organisation’s free resources, such as Open Learn, which some employers may not know about.

We’re a source of extra information that is separate from, but often working in partnership with, their employer, sometimes offering events that are organised jointly. In April, we held one of these on wound care, which proved to be extremely popular with more than 50 attending, including practice, community and trust-based nursing staff.

As learning reps, we give people one-to-one encouragement, helping them along in ways that are personal to their needs. For instance, some nurses may feel less confident about e-learning and need a helping hand to get started. If I can help one individual, that makes all the training worthwhile and is the most rewarding aspect. They will hopefully tell others too, so it shows how the RCN can help nursing staff to feel happier at work, reassuring them they can meet their revalidation requirements.
Activity:

What actions could you take in your workplace to address some of the organisational challenges that are limiting provision and access to CPD?

What support might you need to feel confident to question and influence on behalf of members in your workplace?
10. Further resources

As a learning rep, one of your main activities is signposting staff to appropriate resources. You may even wish to set up a learning centre or hub in your workplace. A detailed list of all relevant resources would be too big to include and may become outdated so we’ve captured a few ideas for CPD and some places where you can signpost people to start to explore.

**RCN and RCNi resources**

**RCN branches**
Many RCN branches also organise free learning activities, while RCN forums can help you network with others in your specialty, finding support, advice and recommendations.
www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/your-career/nurse/cpd-and-searching-for-courses

**First Steps for Health Care Assistants**
An RCN learning resource supporting health care assistants at the start of their career.
http://rcnhca.org.uk/

**Guideline development and evidence-based practice**
The RCN works with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the Scottish Intercollegiate Guideline Network (SIGN) to ensure a nursing perspective is included when guidelines are developed and revised. Contributing to this work counts as CPD.
www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/nice-collaboration

**RCN Leadership**
A suite of bespoke programmes designed to support staff at all levels.
www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/leadership-programmes
RCNi Learning
This includes more than 100 modules, some of which are free on topics such as reducing medication errors in nursing practice.
https://rcnilearning.com/

RCN learning resources
These provide a free online introduction to a growing range of nursing essentials, including continence, diabetes and end of life care.
www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development

RCN Library
RCN members have access to 54,000 books, 1,100 e-journals and 30,000 e-books. The library team are on hand to help anyone navigate their way around and offer training in using the digital resources.
www.rcn.org.uk/library/support/training

RCN professional bulletins
Sign up to receive one, or all of the RCN’s professional bulletins:
• Research and innovation bulletin
• Quality and Safety bulletin
• Library and Heritage Centre news.
www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/research-and-innovation/research-and-innovation-bulletin

Professional networking and sharing practice
Professional networking is another useful way to share and learn from experience, and develop insight and new ways of working. The RCN’s professional forums cover all nursing specialties. As a member you can join for free. They offer great capacity for support and learning from more experienced colleagues.
www.rcn.org.uk/forums
Other resources

The Academy of Fabulous NHS Stuff
A repository of inspirational ideas.
http://fabnhsstuff.net/

AHSN Atlas of Solutions in Healthcare
AHSNs support the diffusion of innovation, promote patient safety, improve quality, put research into practice.
http://atlas.ahsnnetwork.com/

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
Training health care professionals to assess published research.
www.casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists

Education for Health
Free e-learning on subjects such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and chronic urticaria.
https://www.educationforhealth.org/allresources/free-elearning/

Future Learn
Offers free online courses provided by leading UK and overseas universities and organisations. A wide variety of health and psychology learning includes courses on antimicrobial stewardship, Parkinson’s disease, and planning your own research.
https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/categories/health-and-psychology-courses

Health charities
These often provide short courses for health care professionals. They include:
• British Heart Foundation
  https://www.bhf.org.uk/for-professionals/healthcare-professionals/learning-and-development
• Dementia UK
  https://www.dementiauk.org/for-professionals/free-resources/
• Diabetes UK
  https://www.diabetes.org.uk/professionals/training--competencies/courses
• Macmillan Cancer Support
  https://www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/health-professionals/resources#300588
• Mencap
  https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/resources-healthcare-professionals
• Motor Neurone Disease Association
  https://www.mndassociation.org/forprofessionals/professional-education-and-development/

NHS Leadership Academy
Providing a range of programmes and resources for everyone from first-time leaders to senior managers.
www.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk/programmes/

NICE Local Practice Case Studies
Over 500 working examples of quality improvement in health and social care.
https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/into-practice/local-practice-case-studies

National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)
NIHR are always looking for nurses to use their professional experience by becoming a reviewer. Reviewers help the NIHR at every stage of the research process. By identifying research topics, ensuring we fund the best applications and helping to shape our open access reports published by the NIHR Journals Library, reviewers play a vital part in maintaining and improving the quality of our research. Being a reviewer can be used as evidence of CPD.
https://www.nihr.ac.uk/funding-and-support/funding-for-research-studies/become-a-reviewer/
NIHR CLAHRC Partnership Programme
Develop and conduct applied health research relevant across the NHS, and to translate research findings into improved outcomes for patients.
www.clahrcprojects.co.uk/impact/projects

Open Learn
Free learning from the Open University. It includes a section on health, sports and psychology.
www.open.edu/openlearn/

Watch
Winifred Raphael Memorial Lecture.
http://tinyurl.com/j7wgg2n

Sources of funding
As a nursing professional, you can apply for RCN bursaries to fund courses, study tours, projects, research or conference attendance and a range of scholarships, bursaries and other funding opportunities offered by organisations outside the RCN:
www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/scholarships-and-bursaries

Access your employer’s study leave policy and talk to your education lead and RCN learning rep.
www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/rcn-reps/the-role-of-rcn-learning-reps

Charities and hospital and community units often have charitable funding to support education, or example, the Burdett Trust for Nursing Grants.
www.btfn.org.uk/grant-programmes/
The RCN and Health Education England (HEE) are currently working on a Career Framework website for qualified nurses with case studies, helpful links to key documents and access to relevant competencies and guidelines so please visit the Library stand at Congress to see the pilot work achieved so far.
11. References


EAHC/2013/Health/07 Study concerning the review and mapping of continuous professional development and lifelong learning for health professionals in the EU. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/health/workforce/key_documents/continuous_professional_development_en (accessed 03.09.18)


Royal College of Nursing (2017) Healthy Workplace Toolkit for an Agency Workforce www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-006120