# Royal College of Nursing

# RCN Forums and Networks Review Report

*To provide feedback on this report's contents or on your experience of using the publication, please email* **publications.feedback@rcn.org.uk**

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

The completion of this review would not have been possible without the input and support of RCN members and staff. The Task and Finish (T&F) Group which led this review would like to express its appreciation to all forum chairs and committee members who, despite the ongoing challenges of workplace pressures due to COVID-19, continued to engage throughout the review process. The T&F Group is grateful to members for their advice and suggestions which have shaped the content and recommendations of this review.

We would also like to thank all members of the working groups, for the collaboration and commitment to meeting the workstream objectives. In particular, we are grateful for the contribution of the members and staff that were co-opted on to the groups for their particular knowledge and guidance, namely Yvonne Bronsky (Chair, Midwifery Forum), Alison Wileman (Chair, Bladder & Bowel Forum), Katie Bagstaff (Chair, CYP: Acute Care Forum), Carmel Bagness (Professional Lead, Midwifery & Women's Health), Adele Bird (RCN Learning and Development Facilitator) and Nicola Job-Davies (Acute Care and Leadership Adviser).

The contribution of the Forum Governance Group (FGG) and the Forum Chairs' Committee (FCC) and their ongoing engagement throughout the review is very much appreciated.

The work of the T&F Group was completed in the autumn of 2021, and the recommendations of the group have formed the basis of this report. The initial report and recommendations were agreed by the Professional Nursing Committee (PNC) in December 2021. The complexities of the review and recommendations have required further consideration in the context of the Council-led governance review, including the KPMG Report on Governance (the KPMG Report) and changes in the senior leadership team within the Nursing Department.

Some of the operational recommendations of the T&F Group are able to be progressed without further governance approval or additional resources, and work is underway on implementation of these recommendations which are attached at **Appendix 1**. This is being reported through FGG.

# Executive summary

The aim of this review was to look at and recommend ways in which the effective functioning of forums and networks can be optimised, and their professional profile raised to greater effect. To help achieve this, the review set out to define the purpose and role of forums and networks, establish a framework to support improvements in the ways of working, review the governance processes and functions and determine effective ways to maximise the allocated resources to support them.

The professional identity of the Royal College of Nursing requires forums and networks to have the potential to achieve a profile and impact that is reflective of contemporary nursing and leadership practice. This potential needs to be fully recognised, valued, and developed. The forums provide the key platform for the wider membership to engage and shape the professional priorities within the RCN as well as gaining a better understanding of the importance of the dual functions the RCN exercises on behalf of its members. Forums and networks should embody excellence in practice making them influential leaders in policy and standards on behalf of the profession thus attracting the most talented, knowledgeable and credible practitioners and leaders.

Forums and networks are an essential part of the professional structures within the RCN, but their work is not always visible to the wider membership or aligned to the strategic objectives of the organisation. The professional college function enshrined in the Royal Charter compliments and enhances the employment relations function of the RCN as a trade union. There is much opportunity for these two arms of the RCN to collaborate and strengthen the Voice of Nursing. The professional function can play an active role in supporting the employment relations function through the development of professional evidence, guidance and standards. The parity between these functions should be reflected in the infrastructure through which the forums and networks operate.

The guidance which sets out the terms of reference and ways of working for forum committee members needs to be updated, guidance is required for the establishment of national networks, and the support required to ensure that both forums and networks deliver to best effect for members needs to be enhanced.

This review and the recommendations have been shaped and developed by members who have been engaged in forums and networks over the years and have given many hours to the RCN to ensure the members voice is reflected in the professional priorities of the RCN.

The review provided an opportunity to have a focussed engagement with forum steering committee members and the FCC for their views on the functioning of forums in fulfilling the RCN's Royal Charter. However, it was challenging to fully engage in the same way with those members involved with networks. This was because of the difficulty in identifying all networks, variations in their ways of working and in the formal support they receive. The need to formalise an agreed network model is identified in this report.

The format of the report sets out some of the discussions and conclusions arrived at by the working groups, which was informed by a review of existing guidance and engagement with members; this included feedback from forum chairs and steering committee members. The report and recommendations of the F&F Group were agreed by PNC and taken forward with the Executive Team before presentation to Council. The final report and recommendations were approved by Council in May 2022. The Executive Team will now lead the work on the recommendations, with regular progress reports to PNC and quarterly oversight reports to Council.

# 1. Background to the review

A review of RCN forums was last undertaken over ten years ago, where a significant reduction in the number of forums were made; some were amalgamated, while others transitioned to become networks. In 2017, a 'Valuing Forums' project was agreed to champion the RCN professional forums and optimise their process, functions and effectiveness but the full potential of this work was not realised as the project was not completed.

A formal review of forums was agreed by PNC in November 2020. This was put on hold because of the pending forum audit (part of the RCN's internal audit programme), that had already been scheduled to take place and the benefit of having the outcome of this work to help inform the review. The audit aim was primarily to provide assurance over the key controls in place to manage the forums, with a focus on the impact, value and organisational benefit achieved by activities.

The forum audit that was undertaken in 2020 identified six recommendations to strengthen some of the existing controls in place (see **Appendix 2** for summary). Of particular note in the report was the need for this planned review to address the gaps identified in the governance processes around forums and networks and ensure clarity in their functions. Work has already been undertaken and reported to address those recommendations that aimed to strengthen some of the operational ways of working to monitor and support forums.

The audit report was formally received by PNC in December 2020. At the same meeting a further paper was presented which set out the proposed Terms of Reference (ToR) for the establishment of the T&F Group to undertake a review of the forums and set out the scope of that review to include networks (see **Appendix 3**).

# 2. Scope of the review

In December 2020, PNC commissioned a T&F Group to provide a framework and oversight for the development and delivery of a review of the forums and networks.

Five key objectives were set out by PNC as follows:

1. Define the purpose and role of the forums and networks.

2. Establish a framework to support transformative ways of working.

3. Review the governance processes and functions of the forums and networks.

4. Determine effective methods to optimise the resources available to support the forums and networks.

5. Explore ways to engage the wider membership in the work of forums and networks.

In summary, the scope of the review reflected the need to examine how the forums and networks may effectively function, how best to support the key priorities of the forums and networks as key professional drivers within the RCN and to make recommendations on how to gain the best engagement and interaction with the wider RCN membership.

The Terms of Reference and membership of the T&F Group (**Appendix 3**) and the Scope of the Review (**Appendix 4**) were agreed by Council in February 2021.

# 3. An outline of the current forums and networks

**The Forums**

There are currently 35 professional forums. Each forum has a Steering Committee of seven members who are appointed to this role. The Steering Committee elects the Forum Chair.

These committees are clearly defined and operate within the governance structure of the RCN. The current governance and representative structures are set out in **Appendix 5**.

Support is provided to the respective forum through an identified Professional Lead and administrative support from an identified Project Coordinator from the Business Unit.

The functions of the forums are set out as:

· leading the development of knowledge, guidance, and standards within specialist area of interest

· the development and review of publications relevant to their sphere of activity

· influencing policy development

· providing an expert member view to the RCN on their sphere of activity

· representing the RCN with relevant external bodies and stakeholders

· representing the RCN on relevant specialist working groups

· contributing to national and local consultations

· the development and delivery of specialist workshops, conferences, or events.

**The Networks**

There is a range of formal and informal networks that have developed over the years within the RCN. Some of the networks are affiliated with a forum, others report to country and/or regional boards and some have no formal support or governance arrangements in place. There are currently 69 networks which have been mapped within the RCN. There is Council approved guidance on networking at regional/country level. This guidance requires RCN boards to be responsible and accountable for the delivery and performance monitoring of local professional and trade union networking activity. It sets out the need for each region/country network to:

· have a lead member for liaison

· have a staff contact from the regional or country office to provide assistance and support

· have an activity plan which is approved by the board.

There is no guidance or process for the formation of a national RCN network.

# 4. The review process

The agreed scope of the review set out above was progressed through establishing five workstreams:

1. Purpose and role

2. Governance processes

3. Ways of working

4. Support framework

5. Communication and engagement

Each of the workstreams was led by a nominated member supported by a designated staff member.

Members and staff with specific skills, knowledge and expertise were co-opted onto the working groups as required. The working groups were provided with high level aims and objectives to guide the work of the group. They were interrelated and interdependent, however, to avoid unnecessary duplication the project manager and communications lead ensured a cohesive approach across the workstreams.

During the initial stages of the review all existing documents that were available and relevant to the operational delivery of forums and networks were reviewed. These reviews were conducted to establish the current operating arrangements and their relevancy and applicability. This baseline review of documentation was used to determine the changes required to ensure robust operating policies and procedures for the future.

A comprehensive project plan was used to track and monitor the progress of the review. A stakeholder and interdependency map were also established.

Focus groups were arranged with the Project Coordinators (PCs), who are central to the support for forum steering committees and the wider forum membership. Exploratory meetings were also held with a range of other staff across the different services, in order to understand the current support provided to the forums and explore options for improving the necessary support and guidance to the work of forums and networks.

Feedback was obtained by the completion of two surveys: one for forum chairs; and one for the remaining members of forum steering committees. These surveys were aimed at gathering feedback on the current operating arrangements, including the level of support and advice in place for forums and ways to improve and enhance the support, including the improvements required to the governance arrangements.

This comprehensive feedback was provided to the workstreams members and is reflected in the recommendations.

In addition to the forum Chair and steering committee member surveys, a survey was circulated to all RCN members whereby they were asked to identify one change that would improve the effectiveness of forums and networks. This survey is referred to as 'the one change' survey.

While the response rate to the 'one change' survey was relatively low, it provided valuable feedback from a number of networks and network members.

There was an excellent response to the survey circulated to forum Chairs and steering committee members. Over 50% of forum steering committee members and over 95% of forum Chairs responded to this survey. This survey provided rich qualitative information on how to improve the ways of working with forums. As with all surveys it is recognised that there were still some limitations to the survey.

It was recognised that this work was not exhaustive and that more detailed work would be necessary to further progress the implementation of the recommendations.

# 5. The review findings and recommendations

The findings take account of the feedback from the five workstreams as well as the surveys and meetings with key staff groups.

## Defining the purpose and role of Forums and Networks

A review of the purpose and the aims of forums and networks identified significant commonalities. Both champion through their activities the aims of the Royal Charter in promoting the science and art of nursing and education and training in the development of the profession, as well as advancing the specialist interests and the standing of individual members through their work.

Forums and networks bring together members from an identified specialised area of practice or with a specialist or shared interest. They aim to develop nursing policy and practice in their respective field and to provide an expert resource both internally and externally on behalf of the RCN and members.

Through the process of the review the main difference identified between forums and networks, is in the operating model through which respective key aims are delivered, the level of staff support provided and the governance structure currently in place to support the work of the groups. It was therefore important that these issues were considered by the governance workstream.

This workstream considered the operating models applied within other royal colleges and any examples of best practice and learning was considered within this review. Particular consideration was given to how similar organisations worked with their wider membership to enhance membership responsiveness.

## Review of the governance structures, processes and functions of Forums and Networks

### The governance structures and processes

PNC is one of the two key Council committees of the RCN operating with the delegated authority of Council (**Appendix 6**).

The role and function of PNC is to provide professional oversight and governance to the professional work of the RCN. This is achieved through a workplan that addresses the Royal Charter objectives to 'promote the science and art of nursing, education and training in the profession of nursing' whilst promoting the 'advance of nursing as a profession in all or any of its branches' and the professional standing and interests of members.

Included in PNC terms of reference is the following descriptor of its role with regards to forums: 'oversee the governance of forums and ensure that their work is recognised and integrated into the RCN's work related to its role as a Royal College and the delivery of its priorities as well as reflecting specialist interests'.

Of note within the PNC delegated responsibilities is the lack of reference to networks and any relationship with PNC.

PNC has delegated responsibility from RCN Council for public policy and political affairs in so far as they relate to the RCN's work as a Royal College.

**Oversight of Forums**

Oversight of the forums on behalf of PNC is delegated to the Forums Governance Group (FGG), which reports to PNC and is identified in its terms of reference as 'the regulatory mechanism for UK forums'. Its role is 'to ensure that the forums work within the new reporting and decision-making framework agreed by Council and that the work of forums reflects the strategic objectives and priorities of the RCN and to ensure that good governance, financial processes and practices are adhered to by the UK forums'. FGG is responsible for ensuring professional priorities that have received investment on behalf of the RCN are delivered in accordance with the approved framework and to agreed timescales.

Besides these 'regulatory responsibilities', FGG has a role to represent the views of forum members in the decision-making process.

The Forum Chairs Committee (FCC) acts as the representative of Forum Chairs, and like FGG this group is also responsible to PNC, reporting through FGG. FCC is represented on FGG by the Chair of FCC, alongside other forum Chairs. Reporting is addressed more clearly in **Appendix 6**.

**The governance support arrangements**

The Governance Support Committee of Council has an overarching remit for governance across the organisation and to provide guidance on matters such as election cycles and appointments process that will be followed by PNC and FGG in their governance and oversight of the forums.

The governance arrangements including responsibility and accountability between Council, PNC, FGG and the Governance Support Committee are not clear. For example, who should be responsible for decisions on such matters as name change to a forum; considering a request for an extension of term of office; agreeing to the establishment and disestablishment of forums.

There is a lot of information about the governance processes in relation to the functioning and terms of engagement of forums; much of this is set out in the guidance, commonly referred to as 'the Blue Book'. While some of the governance related information could easily apply to networks, there is very little that is specific to the networks which adds to the lack of clarity and governance relating to the scope and authority of networks and their interrelationship (where it exists) with forums. It should be noted that the Blue Book has not been in consistent operational use for some time.

The findings show there are varying networks established throughout the RCN. Existing networks broadly fall into four groups. These are:

- Networks established by Country and/or Regional Boards. Guidance developed in 2013 is generally applied to guide their work. However, throughout the review it was apparent this guidance is not consistently applied. The ethos behind these networks was they should have close working links to the relevant UK forum, however it is apparent this relationship is not embedded in many of the network operations.

- National networks which sit under the structure of the relevant UK forum. There is no consistent operational or structural approach to this, but there are models of good practice that have clear lines of engagement, communication and collaboration. A good example are the networks aligned to the mental health and public health forums. Having aligned networks enhances the specific specialist focus and avoids duplication of effort and minimises confusion amongst members.

- Networks which have been established and maintained by RCN staff members or department (usually the Nursing Department) but do not have formal governance arrangements.

- Networks which have been set up by self-organising members, which have received variable resource from the RCN and have limited governance arrangements in place to ensure the aims, objectives and priorities are aligned with the strategic direction for the organisation.

There is no central repository that holds information on networks established nationally or at Regional/Country level. This further adds to confusion for members and increases the risk of duplication, lack of transparency and bureaucracy. There are varying details on the RCN website relating to some networks and for members it is confusing to understand how these networks or indeed forums operate.

The governance support structures and arrangements in place have not been reviewed and amended to keep pace with the remit, functions responsibilities and priorities of both forums and networks. The governance 'Blue Book' was written in approximately 2003 and would require significant amendment in order to be fit for purpose in the current climate. It is not currently in operation for most forums. There is no one comprehensive governance operating framework in place that sets out the suite of governance policies and procedures that are necessary to ensure the forums and networks achieve their aims and objectives in line with the organisations strategic direction. With a robust governance operating framework in place, there would be no need for a revised 'Blue Book'.

A governance operating framework needs to be developed and take account of areas such as:

- The process and criteria for establishing a forum including the constitution of a forum;

- The process and criteria for establishing an RCN national (UK wide) network including the constitution of such a network and its inter-relationship with relevant forums (if any);

- The process for establishing a Regional/Country network; including the need for an explicit link to UK-wide forums where they exist

- The membership of forums and networks, including the minimum membership required to ensure the viability of a forum or network;

- The reporting arrangements for forums and networks, including their relationship with Council, PNC, and other governance committees;

- The role and function of the Forums Governance Group and its position within the governance structures;

- The accountability arrangements associated with the Forum Chairs Committee and their reporting arrangements to PNC;

- The process for disestablishing a forum or network including the approvals process and communication arrangements to members.

- The financial standing orders for the distribution of the budget for forum or network activity. This will include income generation from forum or network activity.

- Alignment to RCN Strategy.

The governance operating framework should be underpinned with comprehensive policies, protocols and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) designed to support and facilitate the aims and objectives of the forums and networks. These SOP's should set out the communication and collaboration between forums and networks in order to avoid duplication and bureaucracy.

**Recommendation 1**

**Develop a comprehensive Governance Operating framework that takes account of the areas set out above. The framework must be supported by a suite of policies, protocols, financial standing orders, and standard operating procedures.**

**Recommendation 2**

**Set out clearly within the Operating Framework the approvals process for establishing a recognised RCN network for either a practice subject area or a collection/grouping of members.**

a. For practice subject areas their relationship with UK forums including the reporting and communication arrangements is to be described. The arrangements for establishing a National network (practice subject area) and a Regional/Country network (practice subject areas) must be clearly set out with the approval mechanisms described for both. All practice subject area networks must have clear links to the UK forum (where one exists) and no network should be established without initial discussion with the relevant forum who should be involved in their development from the outset.

b. For a collection/grouping of members, their relationship with an identified membership committee, including the reporting and communication arrangements is to be described. The arrangements for a National network (member grouping) and a Regional/Country network (member grouping) must be clearly set out with the approval mechanisms described for both. All member grouping networks must have clear links to an RCN Board/Committee or Council and no network should be established without initial discussion with the relevant Board/Committee or Council who should be involved in their development from the outset. Such networks may be set up as a first step towards the establishment of a national forum or set up for a particular purpose and may be time limited.

**Recommendation 3**

Develop a central web-based repository that holds up to date details of all established forums and networks including their terms of reference, details of the Chair, date established and proposed duration in event of a short-term network being established.

### Professional, operational and financial resources

Throughout the review, a consistent finding related to concerns regarding the professional and operational support for forums and networks. Whilst all participants interviewed were generally complimentary about the quality of professional advice, support and direction provided by staff, it is clear this is limited in terms of capacity and on occasions expertise.

There are currently 5.2 FTE (3 full-time and 4 part-time) project co-ordinators supporting 35 forums. On average one full-time co-ordinator provides support to approximately eight forums which equates to approximately 56 meetings per year. Those that are part-time support four forums. A recent review of the co-ordinator capacity highlighted that approximately 72% of their time is dedicated to supporting the operational running of the forums and the remaining 28% was allocated to supporting with work priorities and specific projects. This leads to variability in the capacity available to support the project work of forums.

Forums by their nature concentrate on specialist practice areas and therefore require specialist advice, support and direction from professional staff leads with the specialist skills and experience within the particular area they are supporting. Professional Leads are overstretched, and the expected level of specialist expertise is currently not available across all forums. Furthermore, the support, advice and direction to forums is only one element of the Professional Lead role, and this results in many competing priorities for these individuals resulting in an inconsistent focus on ensuring protected time to work with forums.

There is no designated staff support for networks at national level. Whilst staff do everything possible to support the work of the networks, there is no dedicated staff resource recruited to support this work.

There is an urgent need to determine the capacity and expertise required to support both forums and national networks. The Director of Nursing and the Country Directors must assess the requirement to support forums and networks at the national, regional and country level. This assessment should consider the best way to ensure the specialist skills required to support forums and networks is provided across the UK.

There is limited operational support aligned to forums and networks. Indeed, throughout the review, forum Chairs advised they take responsibility for setting up meetings, drafting minutes and notes and distributing papers and following up on actions. This is less than satisfactory and the operational support needs to be enhanced as a matter of urgency.

The forums budget is held centrally by the FGG and totals approximately £79,800. There is a lack of clear governance and operational guidance as to how the funding is to be allocated and managed within these structures and the lines of accountability and reporting on financial decision making is unclear. It is also unclear as to how the budget is determined. Each year the forums use approximately 37% of their allocation to support

publications with a similar amount (37%) used to fund exhibitions. It is unclear why the allocation for exhibition funding is aligned with the forums funding. Similarly, clarity is required as to what department is responsible for funding publications and any updates, as this seems to be a historical decision to utilise forum funds for this purpose.

The review group recommended forum funding to be used to commission external expertise on a consultancy basis to enhance the work of specific forums. However, as the funding is allocated by FGG to these other areas mentioned above, there is little flexibility to utilise the monies in this way.

A further issue raised consistently in the review related to the annual funding cycle. This method of allocation means monies cannot be carried over to the next financial year and is lost to the forums if not easily applied in a non-recurrent basis. This limits the allocation and does not allow for long term strategic planning in the allocation of this small amount of funding.

While the RCN has a rich pool of expertise within its membership, it is acknowledged that there may be times when the expertise of others outside of the membership, who are able to commit to the time necessary to support forums to progress areas of work, is sometimes required. However, evidence from the member survey (62% of Chairs and 29% of committee members) suggest that forum funding of external expertise to support the development of projects on a consultancy basis was not considered. Some of the responses indicated that they 'didn't think it was an option', 'getting funding would be difficult, or would be declined'. In considering the support to forums there needs to be a recognition that this may not be readily available internally, and that options for facilitating external support should be considered.

## Recommendation 4

Determine the professional staff capacity including the expertise and skills required to support the forums and national networks across the UK and present a business case to secure the investment necessary for additional resource required.

## Recommendation 5

Determine the operational capacity required to support the business of both forums and national networks and develop a business case to secure the additional resource required.

## Recommendation 6

Carry out a review of the governance and operational management of the budget associated with the forums, ensuring clear guidance is set out in the governance operating framework. The decision making relating to determining the overall budget should be clear and based on the priorities and workplans of the forums. The annual allocation of the funding on a non-recurrent basis should be reviewed, and consideration given to operating within a three-year financial cycle. The operating framework should set out the broad parameters for allocating the funding. Consideration should be given to ceasing the allocation of forum funding to both exhibitions and publications as these are core business requirements for the wider organisation.

**Reviewing the Terms of Reference for the Forum Steering Committee.**

Each forum delivers their work priorities, aims and objectives through an established Steering Committee. These committees have a requirement for a minimum of seven members. The review found that forum members wished a degree of flexibility to be considered with regards to the number of committee members. This is due to the growth and size of some forum membership where some forums have a membership of over 12,000 members whilst others may have less than 1,000 members, whereas the committee constitution for each in terms of members is the same.

To apply to become a forum Steering Committee member, the individual must hold RCN membership of at least three years. Those participating in the review felt this is a disincentive to engaging with the forums. Participants noted engagement in forums is a positive step to engaging with nursing staff early in their career. However, there is acknowledgement that members need to show commitment to the organisation objectives and values through commitment to membership and not purely view forum engagement as a career opportunity but a real opportunity to deliver for the profession. Given forums operate a robust appointment process it is suggested this three-year requirement is removed.

Forum Chairs noted the need for robust succession planning within the forum committee structures. The need to consider adopting a model whereby a 'Chair Elect' is put in place was proposed.

Furthermore, the review highlighted the need for greater adherence to the equality, diversity and inclusiveness (EDI) priorities within the RCN membership. The appointments process to forum committees should take account of EDI as a priority.

**Recommendation 7**

Consider the requirement for three-year membership as a minimum for consideration as a Forum Steering Committee member.

**Recommendation 8**

Consider putting in place a process for succession planning for Forum Chairs.

**Recommendation 9**

Ensure all recruitment to Forum Steering Committees adheres to the organisation's EDI commitments and is reflected in the Operating Framework.

**Enhancing internal and external communication and engagement**

Throughout the review, it is clear the forums and networks are a key structure within the RCN and not only deliver significantly on the professional priorities but equally provide an evidence base for related employment relations priorities for members. However, it is evident that there is no central repository for accessing information, knowledge and resources produced by the forums and networks. Their workplans and reports are not widely visible to the membership and it is challenging to keep up to date with the work of the forums and networks unless individuals are actively engaged.

Participants in the review also noted it is challenging to ensure respective workplans and priorities are fully aligned with the strategic priorities of the organisation. Indeed, the work of the forums and networks are key to shaping the organisations priorities as the voice of the membership is reflected through these structures.

Forums and networks are invaluable to the member engagement strategy of the organisation and there is much work to be done to ensure this resource is maximised to best effect.

The feedback also highlighted the wide-ranging professional expertise held within forums and networks. There are real opportunities to maximise this expertise in external stakeholder engagement as well as engagement on policy priorities with the media. However, work is required to ensure forum and network members are provided with the appropriate communications advice and training necessary to represent the RCN in these external environments.

There are a number of existing platforms available within the RCN to facilitate communication and engagement. However, it was evident these are not used to best effect within the forums and networks. The review group identified a range of existing infrastructures, such as forum webpages, newsletters, bulletins and Member Communication Channels (MCC) that are either limited in their value or could be utilised more effectively to showcase forum and network work, promote better collaborations, and highlight the benefit of forum and network committee membership to the wider audience.

The review group also noted the potential benefits of including forums and networks in the development of the RCN organising model and exploring how this approach could be used to support members to become actively involved in these entities.
The Organising Model promotes self-organisation amongst the membership; members work together in their workplaces and communities to actively address the issues that affect the profession. While in its early stages it is hoped that the model will be beneficial to forums and networks. Engaging with the organising programme board would be a first step to explore ways of working collaboratively and making best use of the structures and resources of the organising model.

## Recommendation 10

Forums and networks need dedicated communications support to ensure robust and timely communication pathways and means of engagement with the wider membership. This includes upscaling the use of digital communication and engagement platforms across the forums and networks.

## Recommendation 11

The forums and networks require dedicated policy support to ensure the skills and capabilities within these groups are used to best effect externally in the representation of the wider profession and the membership. A stocktake of the existing resource should be included in a plan to enhance this resource.

## Recommendation 12

Forum and network members who lead key work areas and are fully engaged in the forum or network should have access to bespoke media training including maximising the use of social media in accordance with the RCN policies and procedures.

### Recommendation 13

There should be a long-term campaign plan that is focused on encouraging and engaging the wider membership in the work of forum and network committees, and ultimately encouraging succession planning to these committee structures. A campaign plan should be developed by the communications department in conjunction with PNC and the Forum Chairs and Network Leads.

### Valuing and recognising Forum and Network committee members.

Forum and network committee members provide significant voluntary time and commitment to the work of the RCN. In order to succession plan and encourage new members to take on these roles and functions, the review group concluded there needs to be consideration to ways to incentivise new members to actively engage and to support members in the work place. Members believe the accredited status utilised within the employment relations department is a successful and well received incentive for representatives who take up these roles, as well as enabling recognition within the workplace. It is proposed that a similar accreditation process should be considered for forum and network committee members including access to training and professional development which will support career progression and assist in revalidation.

Recognition of the value of the professional work taken on by these volunteers should be highlighted to employers and senior nurse leaders in all settings in order to demonstrate the benefits to organisations of encouraging and supporting their employees to participate in forums and networks. Engagement with these senior nurse leaders could see them become advocates for the RCN forums and networks

In examining ways to recognise and offer non-monetary award to those individuals who give significant time to the forum and network priorities, it was seen as important to profile the work of these groups within workplaces. Many members do not know of their existence and furthermore are unsure how they can become involved. Consideration is to be given to the development of a 'Valuing forums and networks' toolkit similar to the 'Valuing Reps' toolkit, which would highlight and demonstrate to employers the benefit of their staff joining an RCN forum or network, in particular becoming a member of a forum steering committee. The 'Valuing Reps' toolkit is an excellent resource and could be easily adopted to developing a similar toolkit for forums and networks.

### Recommendation 14

Give consideration to developing a Forum Steering Committee member accreditation process and develop an annual plan of training, development and CPD opportunities to assist with career enhancement and revalidation.

### Recommendation 15

A 'Valuing forums and networks' toolkit should be developed building on the framework used to develop the 'Valuing Reps' toolkit.

# 6. Conclusions and next steps

This report of the review of forums and networks sets out the high-level recommendations which have now been considered and approved by the Council of the RCN.

The recommendations are in line with the findings of the KPMG report on Governance in the RCN, published in May 2022 and in particular support recommendation 23, to 'improve the role, function and governance of the forum and networks'. The Executive Team will undertake a compliance check against the detail of the KPMG review, and will lead the work on the recommendations, with regular progress reports to PNC and quarterly oversight reports to Council.

It is widely recognised that through the activity of our forums and networks, members make a significant contribution to the professional work of the RCN, which is highly valued. If we are to capitalise on the professional function and maximise visibility and impact of our forums and networks, they need to be given the support that affords them the ability to function effectively and efficiently within a clearly articulated governance structure.

There were limitations on the time and level of analysis that could be undertaken in the execution of this review. Now that the recommendations have been agreed, further work will be required to assess and ensure the survey responses and the financial impact of implementing the changes are considered in the development plan. High levels of collaborative working between forum chairs, steering committee members, network leads and staff will continue to be necessary to bring about the full potential of the recommendations.

These recommendations can provide the first steps to changes that will help forums and networks to function to greater effect and raise their profile and status in the RCN and beyond.

Grateful thanks are extended to the members of the Task and Finish Group:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Tara Bartley** | Co-Chair T&F Group and Chair, FGG |
| **Rachel Hollis** | Co-Chair T&F Group and Chair, PNC |
| **Sally Bassett** | Chair, Forum Chairs Committee and Chair, Nurses in Management and Leadership Forum |
| **Tracie Culpitt** | NSW Committee, PNC & FGG member |
| **Fiona Devlin** | Council Member for Northern Ireland, member of Governance Support Committee and Chair, Northern Ireland Board |
| **Kerryn McGowan** | Chair, Critical Care Forum |
| **Kendal Moran** | Newly Registered Nursing Network member and newly appointed Defence Forum Committee Member |
| **Fiona Pringle** | Chair Fertility Nursing Forum |
| **Ying Butt** | Associate Director of Nursing |
| **Christine Callender** | Head of Nursing (Quality and Regulation) and FGG Staff Lead |
| **Jude Diggins** | Deputy Director of Nursing |
| **Dawne Garrett** | Professional Lead |
| **John Bryant** | Head of Member Communications |

The work of the T&F Group was supported by **Margaret Ojo** Project Manager.

# 7. List of recommendations

21

| | Recommendation |
|---|---|
| **1** | Develop a comprehensive Governance Operating framework that takes account of the areas set out above. The framework must be supported by a suite of policies, protocols, financial standing orders, and standard operating procedures. |
| **2** | Set out clearly within the Operating Framework the approvals process for establishing a recognised RCN network for either a practice subject area or a collection/grouping of members. |
| | a. For practice subject areas their relationship with UK forums including the reporting and communication arrangements is to be described. The arrangements for establishing a National network (practice subject area) and a Regional/Country network (practice subject areas) must be clearly set out with the approval mechanisms described for both. All practice subject area networks must have clear links to the UK forum (where one exists) and no network should be established without initial discussion with the relevant forum who should be involved in their development from the outset. |
| | b. For a collection/grouping of members, their relationship with an identified membership committee, including the reporting and communication arrangements is to be described. The arrangements for a national network (member grouping) and a Regional/Country network (member grouping) must be clearly set out with the approval mechanisms described for both. All member grouping networks must have clear links to an RCN Board/Committee or Council and no network should be established without initial discussion with the relevant Board/Committee or Council who should be involved in their development from the outset. Such networks may be set up as a first step towards the establishment of a national forum or set up for a particular purpose and may be time limited. |
| **3** | Develop a central web-based repository that holds up to date details of all established forums and networks including their terms of reference, details of the Chair, date established and proposed duration in event of a short-term network being established. |
| **4** | Determine the professional staff capacity including the expertise and skills required to support the forums and national networks across the UK and present a business case to secure the investment necessary for additional resource required. |
| **5** | Determine the operational capacity required to support the business of both forums and national networks and develop a business case to secure the additional resource required. |

| | Recommendation |
|---|---|
| **6** | Carry out a review of the governance and operational management of the budget associated with the forums, ensuring clear guidance is set out in the governance operating framework. The decision making relating to determining the overall budget should be clear and based on the priorities and workplans of the forums. The annual allocation of the funding on a non-recurrent basis should be reviewed, and consideration given to operating within a three-year financial cycle. The operating framework should set out the broad parameters for allocating the funding. Consideration should be given to ceasing the allocation of forum funding to both exhibitions and publications as these are core business requirements for the wider organisation. |
| **7** | Consider the requirement for three-year membership as a minimum for consideration as a Forum Steering Committee member. |
| **8** | Consider putting in place a process for succession planning for Forum Chairs. |
| **9** | Ensure all recruitment to Forum Steering Committees adheres to the organisation's EDI commitments and is reflected in the Operating Framework. |
| **10** | Forums and networks need dedicated communications support to ensure robust and timely communication pathways and means of engagement with the wider membership. This includes upscaling the use of digital communication and engagement platforms across the forums and networks. |
| **11** | The forums and networks require dedicated policy support to ensure the skills and capabilities within these groups are used to best effect externally in the representation of the wider profession and the membership. A stocktake of the existing resource should be included in a plan to enhance this resource. |
| **12** | Forum and network members who lead key work areas and are fully engaged in the forum or network should have access to bespoke media training including maximising the use of social media in accordance with the RCN policies and procedures. |
| **13** | There should be a long-term campaign plan that is focused on encouraging and engaging the wider membership in the work of forum and network committees, and ultimately encouraging succession planning to these committee structures. A campaign plan should be developed by the communications department in conjunction with PNC and the Forum Chairs and Network Leads. |
| **14** | Give consideration to developing a Forum Steering Committee member accreditation process and develop an annual plan of training, development and CPD opportunities to assist with career enhancement and revalidation. |
| **15** | A 'Valuing forums and networks' toolkit should be developed building on the framework used to develop the 'Valuing Reps' toolkit. |

# Appendix 1: Task and Finish Group operational recommendations

| Recommendations currently being progressed |
| --- |
| Detailed mapping exercise of current networks should be undertaken; their status should be formalised and aligned to the appropriate model. |
| All forum committees should work to the agreed processes, systems and governance that support their effective working. |
| A designated repository should be developed for all forum reports, such as their annual and representation reports, with a link to the forum webpages. |
| A review of the format of representation feedback forms should be undertaken. |
| Complete overhaul of forum to transform the forum information to a higher level within the RCN and consideration to be given on how the professional forums work can be incorporated in any Mobile Application under development. |
| How the existing methods of communication can be used to promote the professional work of the forums. |
| Consideration should be given on how the work of the forums could be featured in the curriculum for the Learning Reps. |
| The development of the RCN organising model should incorporate the professional activities of RCN forums and networks. |
| Forum and committee contribution to national, local and policy consultations is enabled across the four countries. |
| Forum committee meetings, where the core business of forum matters are discu. |
| All forum related funding should be reported to FGG, this is to include income generated by forums and any underspend in their allocated budget. |

# Appendix 2: Summary report of the forums audit

| Recommendations | Description |
|---|---|
| **Review forums and networks** | To include:<br><br>• Define the purpose of forums and networks.<br>• Guidance on the formation and dissolution of forums.<br>• Review the mechanism for sharing key guidance with forum members - i.e. a central repository of relevant guidance. |
| **Strengthen the FGG project proposal form** | To include:<br><br>• Guidance on the need for KPIs to be measurable<br>• expectations for the project to provide information<br>on the impact expected to achieve. |
| **Project bid tracker to be updated** | • Project progress to be reflected on the tracker.<br>• Outcome/output details from the bid proposal to be included on the tracker. |
| **A planning template to be developed** | Planning template to be used by the forum committee to capture information relating to annual objectives and timelines agreed at the strategy day. |
| **Skills matrix to be used as part of the annual recruitment process for forum committee members** | This will be applied to all forums as part of the recruitment process led by the governance team |
| **Strengthen the annual forums report** | To include information on:<br><br>• what the forum planned to deliver and what was achieved<br>• additional activities in the year<br>• the value and impact of achievements and activities reported |

# Appendix 3: Task and Finish Group terms of reference

**Remit**

The purpose of the Task & Finish (T&F) group is to provide the framework and design for the RCN UK professional forums review within the timeframe to be agreed.

**Responsibilities**

The main responsibilities of the T&F Group are to:

- consider the outcomes of the external audit undertaken and any significant issues to inform the forum review

- determine the scope of the forum review

- set out the aims and objectives of the review

- agree the timeframe for the review to be undertaken

- advise on the formation of possible workstreams to support the timely development of the review

- provide oversight to the work of the forums review.

**Membership**

| Task and Finish Group member | Role |
|---|---|
| **Tara Bartley** | Co-Chair T&F Group and Chair, FGG |
| **Rachel Hollis** | Co-Chair T&F Group and Chair, PNC |
| **Fiona Pringle** | Chair, Fertility Nursing Forum |
| **Tracie Culpitt** | NSW Committee, PNC & FGG member |
| **Kerryn McGowan** | Chair, Critical Care Forum |
| **Sally Bassett** | Chair, Forum Chairs Committee and Chair, Nurses in Management and Leadership Forum |
| **Fiona Devlin** | Chair, Northern Ireland Board and Governance Support Committee Member |
| **Kendal Moran** | Newly Registered Nursing Network member and newly appointed Defence Forum Committee Member |
| **Jude Diggins** | Deputy Director of Nursing |
| **Ying Butt** | Associate Director of Nursing |
| **Dawne Garrett** | Professional Lead |
| **Christine Callender** | Head of Nursing (Quality and Regulation) and FGG Staff Lead |
| **John Bryant** | Head of Member Communications |

# Appendix 4: Scope of RCN forums and networks review

**Aim**

The aim of the review is to optimise the effective functioning and contribution of RCN UK forums, underpinned by robust governance processes. The review aims to maximise the contribution of the forums and to further support, raise the profile and champion the RCN's professional offer and activism in the College in order to advocate for nursing and improvements in practice.
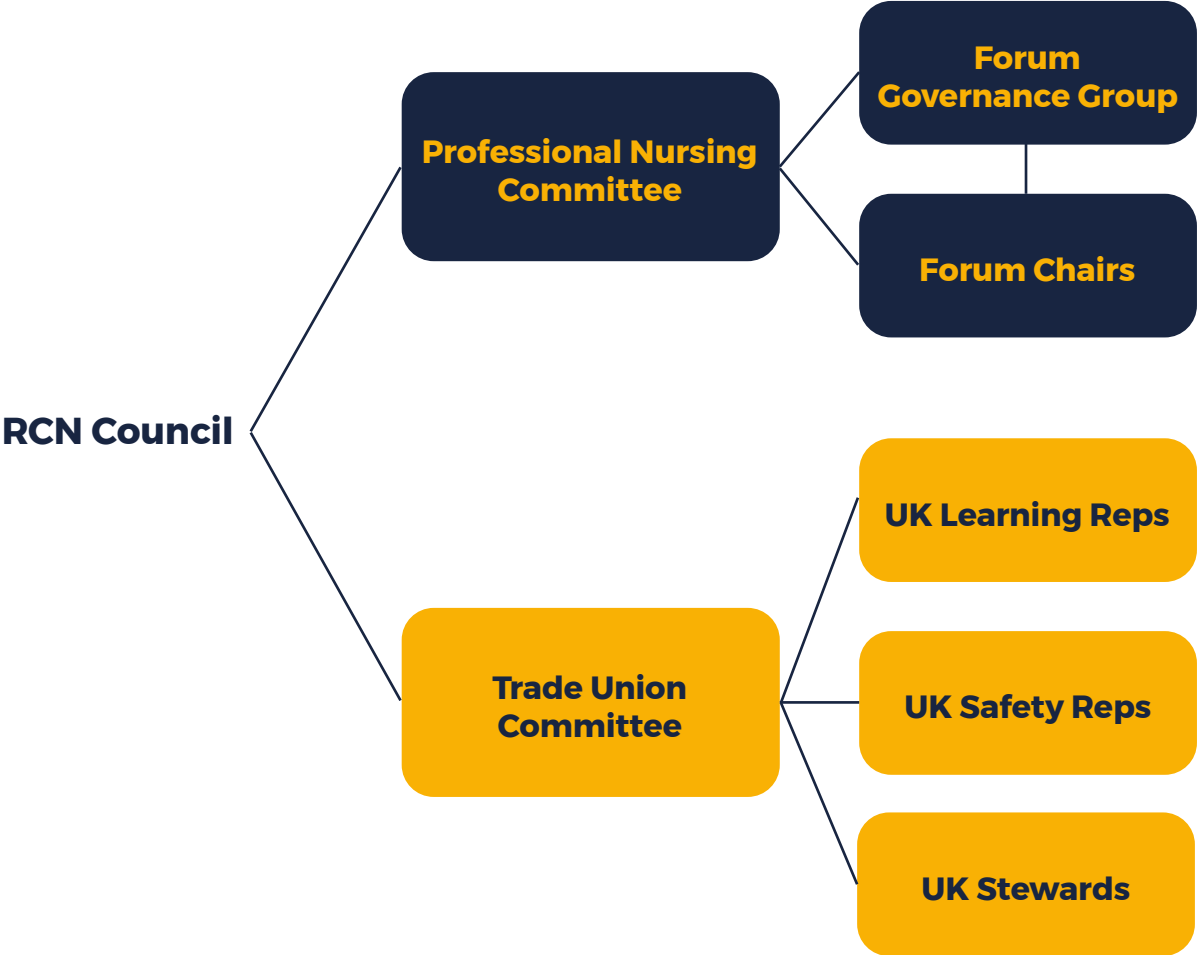
**Objectives**

1. Gain a majority consensus view on the purpose and role of RCN forums and networks, how they differ and the criteria by which they are established.

2. Review the model for the configuration of forums and how the professional networks might align to the structure and governance of RCN UK forums.

3. Promote a structure that enables wider participation with the forum membership. Consider the mechanism for ensuring four-country representation across the forums and facilitate greater links with the four countries and the regions, as well as how to increase collaboration between the forums. Review how other parts of the organisation, such as accredited representatives, boards, branches, and RCN Fellows can interact/interface with the forums.

4. Identify a framework that encourages forum activity to be aligned to, influence and driven by the RCN strategic priorities and a process through which the contribution, value and outputs of their work can be captured.

5. Review the governance framework for forums and networks, this is to include:

   - the process for the establishment and disestablishment of forums and networks
   - clear articulation of the role and responsibilities of FGG, FCC and the relationship with PNC
   - criteria for the steering committee membership that promotes a diverse representation of the RCN
   - terms of engagement by those in formal roles.

6. Review the funding arrangements and resource allocation required to support the effective functioning of the forums, to include:

   - the funding cycle and allocation process for forum projects
   - the level of administrative and professional support by RCN staff
   - modes of communication and support to increase efficiency and effective messaging.

7. Assess the impact of any proposed change to the current forum arrangements.

8. Develop an appropriate engagement/communication plan with the wider membership and ensure their views on developments are considered.

# Appendix 5: Representative and governance structure
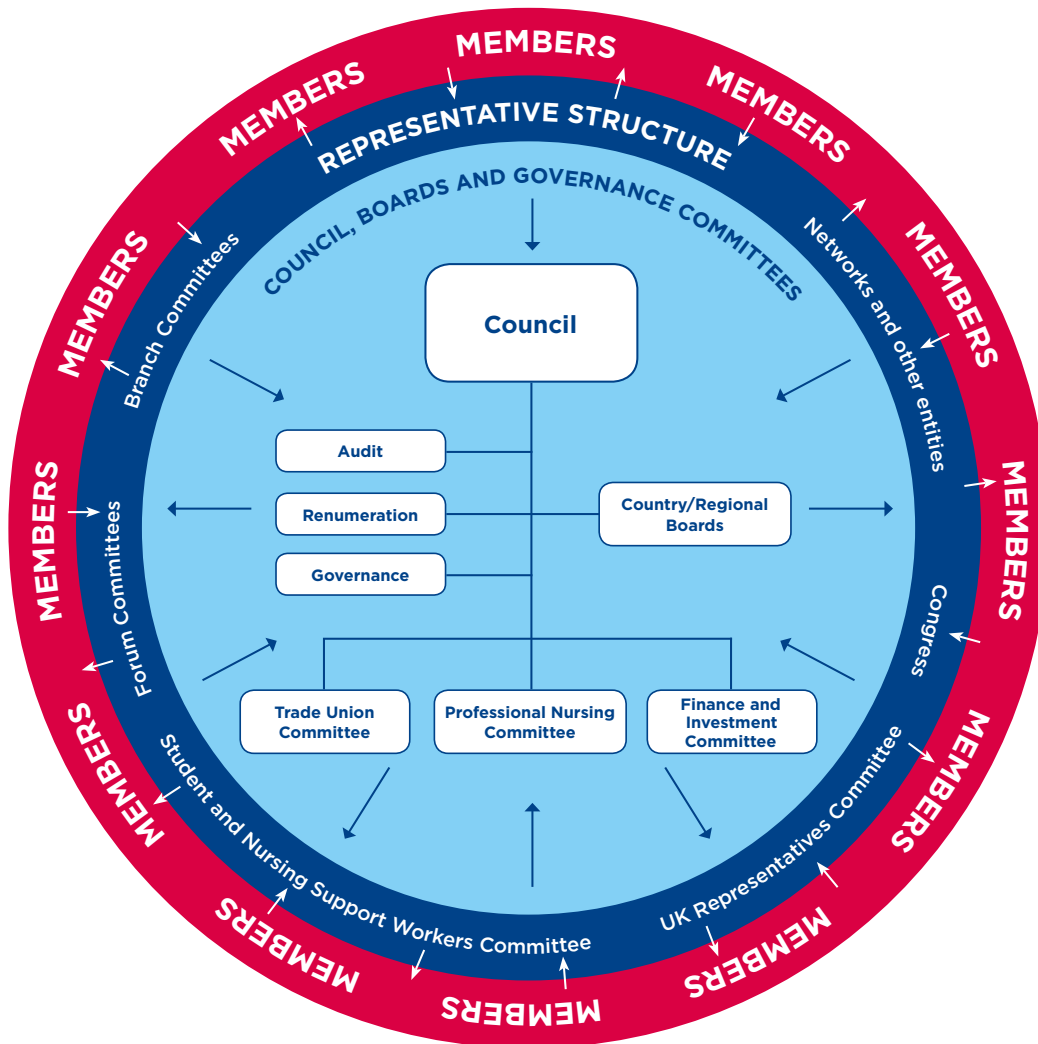


007 926 | October 2019

# Appendix 6:
# Reporting/decision making

```
                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │          Forum          │
                   ┌────│   Governance Group      │
                   │    └─────────────┬───────────┘
   ┌───────────────────────┐         │
   │ Professional Nursing  │         │
   │      Committee        │         │
   └───────────────────────┘    ┌────┴──────────┐
            │              └─────│  Forum Chairs │
            │                    └───────────────┘
RCN Council
            │                         ┌───────────────────┐
            │                    ┌────│  UK Learning Reps  │
            │                    │    └───────────────────┘
   ┌───────────────────┐         │
   │   Trade Union     │         │    ┌───────────────────┐
   │   Committee       │─────────┼────│  UK Safety Reps    │
   └───────────────────┘         │    └───────────────────┘
                                 │
                                 │    ┌───────────────────┐
                                 └────│   UK Stewards      │
                                      └───────────────────┘
```

Royal College
of Nursing