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FOR RCN ACTIVE MEMBERS ACROSS THE UK

SUMMER 2020



# FIGHTING AN UNFAIR FEE

EVA HELPS SECURE GOVERNMENT PROMISE TO SCRAP IMMIGRATION HEALTH SURCHARGE FOR NURSING STAFF

# Worried about the current financial outlook?

The recent pandemic has changed the way we live. It may well have resulted in some financial issues and concerns.

These are just some of the issues you might be considering:

- What to do because the family income has dropped
- Whether to take a mortgage holiday
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Whatever your financial situation, an adviser from Lighthouse Financial Advice – the RCN's preferred partners for professional financial advice – can help.

You are entitled to a complimentary financial review, and the good news is that if you are considering retiring, we understand how your pension works.

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The initial consultation is designed to discover whether or not you would benefit from financial advice and there is no obligation on either side to proceed further. Any advice related fees will be clarified with you before any commitment to proceed.

*Making your money work harder*

- 
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As the first wave of COVID-19 recedes, it is time to pause and reflect on the impact of the pandemic on our profession. Nurses have been at the heart of the UK's response and must be central to rebuilding health and care services. The public has seen nursing staff leading from the frontline; from COVID-19 wards and critical care units through to the community and care homes. Others, unseen, have sustained essential services in the most challenging of situations.

It is easy to lose sight of the fact that 2020 is International Year of the Nurse and Midwife. It's not the year we planned. But it is a year which has seen nursing at its very best, globally and here in the UK. The pandemic has provided opportunities to show the breadth and complexity of nursing today, and our contribution to health and care

teams. The public has shown its support and now it is time for the UK government to recognise the true value of nursing.

As we enter formal pay negotiations, we'll be demanding that the professionalism and dedication of nursing staff is reflected in discussions (see page 9). We must not forget that the crisis began with significant shortages of nursing staff across the UK. In a demonstration of commitment to the profession and patient safety, thousands of nurses were redeployed, or returned to practice and many students opted in to undertake extended clinical placements. But these short-term measures will come to an end, and it has never been more important for us to rebuild the nursing workforce and achieve staffing for safe and effective care.

Anyone who reads this issue of *Activate* will find it hard to deny the impact our active members make and the crucial role you've played in supporting members during this pandemic. From the tireless campaigning of the RCN UK Students Committee (see page 14) to the work of RCN representatives and professional forums (see our amazing RCN award winners on page 16); you, our active members, are demonstrating the value of this profession every day.

## Rachel Hollis

Chair of the RCN Professional Nursing Committee

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Don't forget, this is your magazine. If you've got a story to share, tell us at the email above.

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# 4 UPDATE

## Skin health



We've developed new resources to help nursing staff look after their skin health during the COVID-19 pandemic. With nursing staff washing their hands and using alcohol rub and gloves more frequently, maintaining skin health and avoiding skin conditions such as dermatitis is a key concern.

Find the resources, which include an online learning programme, at [rcn.org.uk/skin-health](https://rcn.org.uk/skin-health) and turn to page 12 for a pull-out poster.

The resources have been created in collaboration with Mölnlycke and SC Johnson Professional.

## Stay informed

Don't forget, active members can receive the latest news from the RCN in our monthly email *eActivate*. Make sure you're signed up to receive RCN emails by logging into [rcn.org.uk/MyRCN](https://rcn.org.uk/MyRCN) and checking your preferences.

## COVID-19: what we want for nursing staff now



On 19 June, we reached 100 days since the pandemic was declared. To mark the date, we set out eight key priorities that we want UK governments and health and care employers to commit to for safely rebuilding health and social care services following the initial peak of the pandemic.

Two of the priorities focus on the need for comprehensive mental health support for nursing staff and other health care workers. We want employers to fund timely access to counselling and psychological support for all staff, as well as support the health and wellbeing of nursing staff. Other priorities include committing to full

and proper risk assessments; tackling underlying causes that contribute to placing black, Asian and minority (BAME) ethnic staff at heightened risk; ensuring nurse leaders are equipped to futureproof infection control and critical care capabilities; and supporting students as they resume their studies.

RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Dame Donna Kinnair said: "Nursing staff across the UK have shown remarkable leadership, professionalism and commitment. But as we move past the peak of the epidemic, we must care for those who've been caring." Visit [tinyurl.com/100-days-covid-19](https://tinyurl.com/100-days-covid-19)

## RCN Annual General Meeting

The RCN Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held online on 6 August 2020 at 2pm. Questions can be emailed in advance to [governance.support@rcn.org.uk](mailto:governance.support@rcn.org.uk). For more information, including on how to attend, visit [rcn.org.uk/agm](https://rcn.org.uk/agm)

## Independent governance review

In June, we published the report from our independent governance review which was called for by members at RCN Congress in 2019 and was conducted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS).

The aim of the review was to ensure members own the organisation's strategy, and have the opportunity to influence and shape their organisation and inform the decisions that are taken.

The review was due to be discussed at RCN Congress 2020.

With this not taking place, RCN Council has offered members other opportunities to discuss the review, including a dedicated email inbox for feedback and a series of webinars held in June and early July led by RCN Council members, in which members could ask questions and share their thoughts.

Chair of RCN Council Dee Sissons said: "We wanted to give all members the chance to talk to elected Council members directly about the report and how it should change the College.

"Discussions with members are generating fascinating ideas and we will be using these to take this work forward. Our governance structures, people and processes are only correct if they serve

members effectively and give them confidence in the organisation. As your Council, we are committed to this work."

RCN Council has accepted all recommendations from the review in principle and will use members' feedback on the report to help inform the future direction of this work.

Further information will be published on the RCN website at [rcn.org.uk/governance-review](https://rcn.org.uk/governance-review)



## Risk assessments and vulnerable workers

Recent NHS joint trade union guidance sets out principles on health and safety risk assessment for COVID-19 and vulnerable workers, including black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff. RCN reps can download

the guidance from our COVID-19 trade union activity area on our online learning portal. Use your MyRCN details to log in at [learn.rcn.org.uk](https://learn.rcn.org.uk) or use the link on the RCN Reps Hub at [rcn.org.uk/reps-hub](https://rcn.org.uk/reps-hub)

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## 6 CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE

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# Fighting an unfair fee

Eva Omondi's crusade to challenge the immigration health surcharge began at RCN Congress in 2018. She explains how it's resulted in a government promise to scrap the unfair fee for health care workers



For Eva Omondi (pictured above), the fight to remove the immigration health surcharge (IHS) for health care workers from overseas was personal. To afford it, she was forced to work extra shifts, separate from her children, and take out loans that she is still paying off now.

This May, under pressure from Eva's campaigning, the RCN and others, the UK government finally promised to scrap the IHS for health care workers.

The fee, which sees all migrants who come to the UK from non-EEA (European Economic Area) countries pay £400 a year for the NHS, whether they use its services or not, is due to increase to £624 per year from October.

Speaking out against unfair government policies is not an easy decision but Eva, an NHS nurse who is originally from Kenya, was determined to fight for her family and overseas nursing staff all over the UK.

In 2015, Eva paid the IHS fee when she applied for her work visa. After saving money to pay for visas for her family, she then discovered the IHS also had to be paid for every individual family member, and paid upfront for the number of years each visa lasted. This meant £3,600 on top of their usual visa fees. To afford it, Eva and others have had to borrow money. To pay the money back, they've had to work overtime. To work overtime, they had to find childcare.

“

We are committed to the health of this nation. This is the time to recognise us

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Overseas workers have no recourse to public funds and therefore can't access government-subsidised childcare, leaving Eva and others stuck in a vicious cycle. "Currently I am a theatre nurse, so you can be called at any time," Eva says. "The only option was to look for cheaper childcare, which meant taking my children back home to Kenya. That separated me from my little ones."

### Action at Congress

Eva, an RCN steward and Eastern region board member, decided to draft a resolution to oppose the IHS to be debated at RCN Congress in 2018.

As Congress approached, the item gained media attention. "It was on the radio and in newspapers," Eva says. "I realised that many other people identified with it."

Eva presented her resolution on the main stage at Congress, delegates passed it almost unanimously and the RCN took up the cause. Media interest increased, and Eva was interviewed by the BBC, local radio and newspapers.

There was an early setback when the government announced later that year that it was doubling the fee to £400 and it announced another planned increase in 2020. "That was like a slap," Eva says. "But the RCN has been alert to any opportunity to support the campaign. I cannot say

how grateful I am for the support from RCN members."

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the spotlight turned to health care workers. "The pandemic has magnified how unfair the government has been. We've been putting our lives on the line," says Eva.

The RCN increased pressure on the government and in May, it finally pledged to exempt health care workers from the unfair charge. "I cannot tell you how overjoyed I was," Eva says.

The RCN is now pushing for clarity on how this will be implemented – calling for confirmation that staff in the independent and social care sectors, and spouses and dependents of health care workers, will be exempt.

### Future goals

Eva wants to continue campaigning. She is calling on the UK government to: scrap no recourse to public funds for health care workers; consider extending leave to remain to staff working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; and pledge not to freeze NHS wages.

"We are committed to the health of this nation," Eva says. "This is the time to recognise us." She also has a message for RCN members: "We are the RCN. By speaking out, we highlight issues that affect us."

### Did you know?

The RCN is calling on the Home Office to grant indefinite leave to remain to all international health and care staff who have worked in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit [tinyurl.com/nursing-right-to-remain](https://tinyurl.com/nursing-right-to-remain)

Words by  
Rachael Healy.  
Picture by  
Gareth Harmer

## 8 IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# The NMC Code and COVID-19

READ  
MORE  
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[rcn.org.uk/  
activate](https://rcn.org.uk/activate)

Working in a pandemic can be stressful, but nurses must remain aware of the legal impact their actions can have. Roz Hooper explains what the NMC has put in place and how we're supporting members



### What changes has the NMC made?

To take pressure off frontline staff during the pandemic, the NMC decided to temporarily delay revalidation, a move we were consulted on and supported (see page 11). Meanwhile, the regulator has confirmed it will take the extraordinary circumstances nurses are working in into account if they're referred for issues such as accountability and delegation.

We agree with the decision not to tell people if they've been referred unless it's absolutely necessary. Some of these referrals won't be investigated

for some time so there's no benefit to having this hanging over anyone right now.

### Why is record keeping so important?

Nursing staff are having to make difficult decisions in extraordinary circumstances. So, make sure your record keeping and documentation is as accurate as possible and remind members how important this is. Nobody is going to succeed in criticising you if you made a decision that can be justified. We know that record keeping may also have been affected by the pressure members are working under. The RCN is on your side and will continue to fight your corner.

### How is the RCN supporting those on the temporary NMC register?

We recognised that members in our retired membership category who have returned to work may need workplace support and we're now offering this to them at no extra cost.

### What's your advice on using social media?

The heightened emotion in these times can make people more unguarded, but the usual rules apply. Whistleblowers should use an organisation's policy rather than social media to raise concerns. Read the NMC's social media guidance and tread cautiously if you say you're a nurse.

### How is the legal team preparing to support members during the next phase of the pandemic?

We're already hearing from members who are involved in inquests related to COVID-19 and we're supporting them with this. Virtual hearings at the NMC have now been introduced and we're working with the NMC to ensure that they are fair, and that the outcomes from members' cases will not suffer as a result.

*Roz Hooper is RCN Head of Legal (Regulatory). Read more at [rcn.org.uk/activate](https://rcn.org.uk/activate)*



# Recognising the true value of nursing staff

Graham Revie explains how the RCN Trade Union Committee, which he chairs, will be supporting members to lead the fight for a meaningful pay rise this summer

The last six months have been among the most challenging and fascinating of my working life. No sooner had I been elected to the RCN Trade Union Committee and become its chair than COVID-19 dominated our professional and personal lives like nothing we've ever known.

If you know me, you'll know I yield to nobody in my determination to ensure our College does the best possible job for members. And there's no alternative but to have genuine engagement with all members and for elected members to take the top decisions that affect our profession the most.

It is in that spirit that I'm leading the committee as it looks at the next NHS pay round. I will not re-run old arguments here about historic mistakes in this field – only to say that I'm making sure that every lesson has been learned and we are able to rebuild the lost trust.

Supporting our members to deal with the here and now has been the overriding priority and

during the spring we secured real improvements to members' overtime pay and sick pay. The pandemic is far from over, but it's prudent to look at the future and ask members the biggest questions about where our profession goes next.

## Listening to members

Record numbers of you – tens of thousands – told us through a survey about your experience of work during COVID-19 and what you expect on the other side. Members used it to speak up clearly and the task in hand is to make sure those views are heard.

As we begin to look at the next NHS pay settlement, we will use this as proof of the need for employers and politicians alike to truly recognise the value of nursing staff – with deeds, not more words. This includes your pay, working conditions and genuine respect in the broadest sense.

For too long, your pay hasn't matched the highly skilled and complex work we do – whether



in the NHS or other sectors. The fight for a meaningful pay rise will be led by members this summer and I urge every one of you to be as active as you can when the time comes. Your voice drives our action for your benefit.

## Building a better future

As *Activate* went to press, the results of our all member survey on how we should build a better future for nursing were being analysed. Read more and find out how you can get involved at [rcn.org.uk/building-a-better-future](https://rcn.org.uk/building-a-better-future)



## Changes to furlough

The government announced changes to the COVID-19 Job Retention Scheme at the end of May. Head of legal (Employment) Joanne Galbraith-Marten explains the changes reps should be aware of

### **Is it still possible to be furloughed?**

The COVID-19 Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) closed to new entrants on 30 June. Employers are now only able to furlough employees who have previously been furloughed for a minimum of three weeks, meaning the last date a new employee could be furloughed for the first time was 10 June.

The exceptions to this include a parent returning to work after statutory maternity or paternity leave, adoption leave, shared parental leave or parental bereavement leave. Under these circumstances, as long as their employer has already been using the scheme, employees remain eligible for furlough.

### **Can members work for their employer after 1 July and still be furloughed?**

New flexible arrangements were implemented on 1 July and furloughed employees could return to work on a part-time basis from that date. However, this must be agreed in writing. Employers will pay for the hours employees work and the government grant will

continue to cover the hours the employee doesn't work, subject to the grant cap.

### **How will pay be calculated if an employee remains furloughed?**

From August to September, the government grant will be tapered. From 1 August, although the grant will still provide 80% of a furloughed employee's gross monthly wages, employers will have to pay National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and minimum pension contributions. In September and October, the government grant will be tapered to 70% and 60% respectively, with employers required to pay the remaining percentage alongside NICs and minimum pension contributions.

### **Can members be put on notice of redundancy while furloughed?**

While the CJRS is an alternative to redundancy, staff can still be made redundant while furloughed and will be entitled to a redundancy payment if they have more than two years' continuous service.

### **When does the scheme close?**

It's anticipated that it will close on 31 October 2020.

### **If a member is currently on SSP can they be furloughed instead?**

Paragraph 6.3 in the second Treasury Direction which applies to claims made on or after 22 May 2020 (or claims made before that date that would have complied with it), now suggests that an employer can elect whether or not to furlough an employee entitled to statutory sick pay (SSP), and can furlough those employees not in receipt of SSP even if they are entitled to it.

For more information visit [rcn.org.uk/covid-19-advice](https://rcn.org.uk/covid-19-advice)





## Revalidation extensions

With the NMC extending some revalidation periods, it's important that members know when they need to revalidate. Here's a summary of how the extensions work

### Members who were due to revalidate March to June

The NMC automatically extended revalidation application dates by 12 weeks for any nurses who were due to revalidate in March, April, May and June 2020.

Those affected should have received an email telling them their new revalidation application date.

If members who were due to revalidate in March and April were unable to submit their application within their first 12-week extension, they should have automatically received a further 12-week extension.

Members who were due to revalidate from May 2020, who need a second extension, can request one through NMC online. Members requesting a further extension will need to declare that they were unable to complete their application because of the impact of COVID-19, and that their confirmer supports the request for a further extension.

### Members due to revalidate in July and August

Members who are due to revalidate in July and August can request a 12-week extension through their NMC online account once their revalidation application is open.

#### Keep in mind

These extensions don't apply to annual fees and any member who is granted an extension will still need to pay their fee on time.

Once a member revalidates, their new three-year registration period will still start from their original renewal date. This means there will be a short period of overlap between the extension to their current registration period and their new registration period.

Members can count any activities they undertake towards either of their revalidation applications, but they can't use the same activities twice for both applications.

### Supporting members

These extensions have been put in place so that nurses who have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis have extra time to meet revalidation requirements.

If members are able to revalidate on time, we're advising them to do so.

Our website has a range of information and resources to support members through revalidation.

Visit

[rcn.org.uk/revalidation](https://rcn.org.uk/revalidation)

The information on this page was taken from the NMC's website and was correct at the time *Activate* went to press. For the latest information about revalidation extensions, and to download the NMC's guide *How to Revalidate during COVID-19*, visit [nmc.org.uk/covid19-revalidation](https://nmc.org.uk/covid19-revalidation)

PULL OUT  
AND DISPLAY  
THIS POSTER IN  
YOUR WORKPLACE

# Signs of work-rela



- Do you know the signs of dermatitis of the hands? Look out for **dryness**, **itching** and **redness** which can lead to **cracking**, **blistering**, **flaky** and **scaly** skin.
- At the end of each work period protect your hands by regularly applying hand moisturising creams (containing emollients) after handwashing. Always wet hands ahead of applying soap, as this is a common problem with drying of nurses' skin. Ensure that you rinse and dry thoroughly. Follow established procedures for hand washing.
- 93% of nursing staff who responded to our skin health survey said that they had experienced some kind of skin condition, including cracking, scaling and pain in the last 12 months.

[rcn.org.uk/skin-health](https://rcn.org.uk/skin-health)

# Work-related dermatitis



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2020

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- Under health and safety law, your employer should have a programme of skin checks in place for nursing staff exposed to the risk of work-related dermatitis.
- Report any problems to your manager or occupational health provider.

Who to speak to about work-related skin problems:

In collaboration with

  
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## 14 NURSING IN A PANDEMIC

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# The voice of nursing students

COVID-19 has seen the RCN Students Committee busier than ever before. Chair Jess Sainsbury explains how the committee has been fighting for funding while making sure students are supported



With COVID-19 putting nursing in the spotlight, public support for student nurses has also become more visible. “We’ve been watching different petitions and comments pop up all over the place,” says Jess Sainsbury, Chair of the RCN UK Students Committee (pictured above). “People are calling for tuition fees to be scrapped and recognising the challenges student nurses are facing, especially during the pandemic.

“Our *Fund our Future* campaign in England has had public support before now, but nothing compared to what we’ve seen recently. It feels more powerful and we need to act on that.”

Jess says the sense of partnership with other trade unions also feels stronger. “We’re all asking for the same thing,” says Jess. “And that’s for student nurses to be able to throw themselves into

placements and the academic side of nursing without having to worry about money.”

The RCN and other unions recently wrote to the health secretary calling on him to recognise the contribution of nursing students. It outlined demands for student funding in England, which include abolishing student-funded tuition fees, introducing maintenance grants that reflect student need and

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We wanted the RCN to be clear that students would be supported no matter what decision they made

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🕒 Find our latest advice for students at [rcn.org.uk/covid-19-students](https://rcn.org.uk/covid-19-students)  
Catch up on RCN student webinars at [tinyurl.com/student-webinars](https://tinyurl.com/student-webinars)

Words by  
Zara Davies.  
Picture by  
James Newell

reimbursing fees or forgiving debt for current nursing students. The RCN has yet to receive a response despite publicly reiterating its calls at the end of May.

Although the lack of response is disappointing, Jess and the committee remain focused on building momentum. Jess says: “We’re organising discussions with MPs and we’re thinking about how we can maintain public support. We also want to contact the Education Select Committee about the impact of COVID-19 on nursing students, not just during the crisis but the ongoing impact it’ll have on newly qualified nurses and those still studying.”

### At the forefront

As well as leading the campaign on student funding, the committee has played a part in providing feedback on options for student nurses during the pandemic and has been directly supporting members through what has been a very anxious time for many.

Jess says that whichever route students have decided to take, they will feel the impact. “Those in their final year who have chosen the theory route are understandably worried about their outstanding placement hours,” says Jess. “It’s a really tricky situation because it’s not just about getting the hours in, it’s about the quality of that practice experience as well.”

Those that have chosen paid clinical placements have had differing experiences across the UK, says Jess. “Some students have been given different advice from their

employer and university, and it’s hard to know who to listen to. This is where RCN reps have been so valuable and we’re really grateful for their support. Our student ambassadors have also been supporting members and feeding issues into the committee.”

### Supporting every student

Jess recounts that when the NMC’s emergency standards for education were first proposed, health trade unions were invited to the discussions. Although RCN Chief Executive & General Secretary Dame Donna Kinnair was the person attending these meetings, she was representing the students committee. “Right from the start, we felt our voice was heard,” says Jess. “Dame Donna listened to us and took our concerns and queries back to the NMC.

“We felt it was really important that students had a choice whether to go on a paid clinical placement, and that those who chose not to wouldn’t be disadvantaged by that decision. We also wanted the RCN to be clear that students would be supported no matter what decision they made.”

Part of the support offered to students right now are twice-weekly webinars, organised and hosted by the students committee. “We want to share as much information as possible,” explains Jess. “And offer student nurses additional learning opportunities. I hope that student members see the influence the committee can have and feel supported in the way we’re representing them.”

# 16 RCN AWARDS

## Reps and Student Ambassador of the Year

Meet our winners, who have all made an exceptional contribution to the RCN and a real difference to the members they support

### Learning Rep of the Year: Lesley-Anne Hodgkiss



Lesley-Anne is a clinical trainer working in the independent sector. She finds that her rep role fits naturally with her thirst for knowledge and championing learning. She says: “I’m passionate about

nurses having the information to empower themselves.”

Lesley-Anne is particularly proud of her work delivering preceptorship training for her employer, where she has trained more than 200 nurses so far – many of them international nurses.

While it is part of her day job, she has been able to bring her rep experience to

the training, supporting the acclimatisation of nurses coming to a new country.

Lesley-Anne received an incredible seven nominations for her Rep of the Year award. Oluchukwu Ekee, one of her nominators, says: “Once I see Lesley-Anne’s name as a trainer, there is a lift of joy in my heart. I know I’m going to understand all the details of that training.”

### Safety Rep of the Year: Vicky Brotherton

Vicky is an advocate for how RCN reps can work together for better outcomes. In her cases, she will often ask for the input of a learning rep if the member needs to access training; a fellow steward if a difficult case requires anonymised discussion; or a fellow safety rep when health and safety issues need shared working.

Vicky is also passionate about supporting members to access mental health and wellbeing support.

Vicky says: “At every health and safety meeting, I always want to know how many staff are off work due to stress, whether it is work-related, and what support they are receiving.” Alison Williams,



Vicky’s colleague and nominator, describes Vicky as “a calm, experienced nurse who is well respected due to her professionalism.”



## Steward of the Year: Karen English



For Karen, being a steward means “you can empower members, provide support, promote best practice, rebuild trust in broken relationships, and enhance the reputation of the trust you’re working in.”

Karen feels her greatest achievements have come

in the cases where she has helped members to remain in post when they believed they were going to lose their job. Karen says: “When we create a really good professional relationship between the manager and member which is able to continue, that makes me proud.”

Karen has great support in her role from her RCN regional office, but also from members of her RCN branch, none more so than her nominator and fellow steward, Kath Allan. Kath says it’s really beneficial having someone

with Karen’s insight and describes her as someone who goes above and beyond in her role as a steward.

Kath says: “Karen recognises how brave members have to be to contact the RCN, especially when managers aren’t keen for you to contact a union person.”

Karen’s advice to new stewards is: “Be open and transparent and fight for what you believe. Make the member feel safe and respected in their workplace. More than anything though, enjoy yourself.”

## Student Ambassador of the Year: Clare Manley

Clare received the Student Ambassador of the Year award to mark her incredible efforts to raise the profile of the RCN at her university.

Clare developed and delivered a lecture for first year students which highlighted the value of the RCN library and the student ambassador role, set up RCN noticeboards in all of her placement areas and arranged for 20 students in her region to attend RCN Congress in 2019.

Now qualified, Clare plans to remain active and is already involved in a project to expand support for newly qualified nurses (NQNs). Clare says: “People can feel alienated when they join the world of work so we want them to know the RCN is here. We recently set up an RCN Twitter account for NQNs and within a few days, it had more than 1,000 followers.”

RCN UK Students Committee Chair Jess Sainsbury, who



nominated Clare for the award, says: “Clare has worked tirelessly for students nationally. She has done it with passion, grace, and without complaining. We all need someone like Clare to advocate for us. She is an inspiration to us all.”

# Awards of Merit

This year four members receive the Award of Merit, the highest honour the RCN can give for voluntary service recognising those who have gone above and beyond to support fellow members

## Dr Sonya Clarke

Sonya was Chair of the RCN Society of Orthopaedic and Trauma Nursing (SOTN) from 2015 to 2019, having served the previous four years on the steering committee, during which time it went from strength to strength. Sonya was instrumental in the writing or revising of key guidelines and the publication of competencies for orthopaedic and trauma nurses. Her work on the society's

steering committee ensured that casting courses are now delivered in Northern Ireland, where previously students had to travel to Scotland or England.

Described by more than one of her nomination supporters as a role model, Sonya was tireless in her commitment to the society, all the while continuing her work as a senior lecturer and completing a Doctorate in Education (EdD).



Sonya says: "I was shocked, delighted and humbled on receiving notification that I was to receive the Award of Merit. The RCN has continued to support and guide my nursing career, my aim is to make a difference."

## Denise Kelly



Denise is an RCN steward and was recently elected as Northern Ireland member on the RCN Trade Union Committee. She played a key role in raising public

awareness of the RCN's safe staffing campaign in Northern Ireland and during the recent industrial action, Denise was her trust's strike committee lead. The role involved a lot of travel to meet colleagues face to face and ensure they were prepared. This was at a time when Denise was also completing a postgraduate certificate and working full-time nightshifts.

One of Denise's nomination supporters said: "I have never been so inspired by the commitment of a colleague." Denise says: "I strive to ensure that members' voices are heard, even if what is being said is difficult. It is overwhelming that someone has taken the time to nominate me and it strengthens my resolve to continue to support members."

## Denise McLaughlin

Denise is chair of the RCN UK Safety Reps Committee and has been involved with the RCN as an active member since 2004 when she became a steward. She became a safety rep two years later and for the past four years Denise has been staff side chair in her organisation.

Denise has served in a number of roles during her time with the College including as chair and vice chair of RCN branch committees, where she

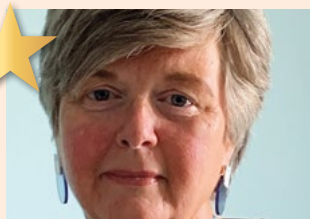
has worked to increase local member engagement. Drawing upon this experience, she successfully oversaw the merger of two local branches, which she then chaired for two years. Denise has also served eight years as a member of the RCN Northern Board.

A supporter of Denise's nomination said: "Activists such as Denise come along all too rarely. She is a glowing example of a professional rep." Denise says: "To receive



an award of this stature is particularly poignant in this current unprecedented time with the challenges being faced by the profession. It is a real privilege to be able to represent local members and to support reps within my national role."

## Dr Alison O'Donnell



Alison is a past chair and steering committee member of the RCN's History of Nursing Forum. She has made an exceptional contribution to the forum and the RCN, particularly in Scotland.

During her time on the committee, Alison played

a crucial role in providing mentoring and support for new members, writing blogs, contributing articles to *Nursing History Now* magazine and organising Congress fringe events. Her time on the committee saw the forum's membership triple to more than 2,000 members.

Alison has travelled around Scotland recording nurses' oral histories and was actively involved with the RCN's centenary celebrations in 2016. She continues to volunteer for the RCN archives weekly.

Alison has also been involved in a project digitising RCN committee records, which a supporter of her nomination says "has led to a more critical understanding of the work of the RCN."

Alison says: "My role as a volunteer for the RCN archives has afforded me the privilege of linking the stories of the past with current caring challenges, and this award affirms to me that nursing history has parallels with today's contemporary health care setting."

Read more about our Award of Merit recipients online at [rcn.org.uk/activate](http://rcn.org.uk/activate). You can also find out about the members who have been awarded RCN fellowships for their commitment to advancing the science and practice of nursing, and the improvement of health care at [rcn.org.uk/bulletin](http://rcn.org.uk/bulletin)

# Five decades of debate

Although RCN Congress couldn't go ahead this year, a new digital archive is letting us relive Congresses past. Former RCN President Maura Buchanan helps us explore how the event has evolved



The main stage at RCN Congress in 1989

The first official RCN Congress and Exhibition took place in Harrogate in 1969. It was part of a push to make the RCN livelier and more inclusive, which began two years earlier when the RCN Representative Body opened to all members around the UK, who were encouraged to submit topics for debate.

RCN Congress has since evolved into a polished, impressive event with inspiring speeches and debates that prompt headlines, direct the College's priorities, and even result in changes

to law. This evolution can be traced in the newly digitised Congress archive. "Now, you've got a very professional stage and set. After the Labour and Tory party conferences, RCN Congress is next in terms of size and importance," says Maura Buchanan, former RCN President.

Maura first attended Congress in 1986, as a third-year nursing student, and went on to chair the event from 1999 to 2002. "This year would've been my 35th consecutive Congress," she says. "My first Congress was amazing.

Here you were, seeing people that you'd read about. Dame Sheila Quinn was the President that year and she was my idol. You get to meet your heroes and see that they are just normal people and you can follow in their footsteps." Inspired, when a student item came up on the final day, Maura took to the microphone. It was to be the first of many appearances on the RCN Congress stage.

In 1986, Congress was a week-long event and there were many more topics up for debate than there are now. "Some of the

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You get to meet your heroes and see that you could follow in their footsteps



issues have not changed in 30 years, but the structure of Congress has,” Maura says. “We used to have around 50 items on the agenda, there weren’t as many of the keynote speakers, awards and lectures we have now.”

### Expanding and evolving

RCN Congress has always been evolving. Fringe events have expanded, with the RCN forums leading educational sessions that can be part of delegates’ CPD. Meanwhile, the first annual John Goodlad Memorial Lecture took place in 1993, and by 1998 cameras filmed the proceedings and broadcast speakers onto large screens.

Many significant decisions have been influenced by Congress too – from the 1976 vote for the RCN to become a trade union, to the fierce debate in 2000 that led to widening membership to include nursing support workers and cadets.

For Maura, standout moments include politicians directly engaging with RCN members – something that’s been lacking in years when Congress is held after election season. “It’s important that they take nursing staff seriously politically, and that’s what we want,” she says.

In 2002, Maura’s final year as Chair of Congress, Secretary of State for Health Alan Milburn came to speak

and take questions from delegates. Maura asked the final question: “I said: ‘My daughter is a policewoman – why are nurses not paid as much as other public sector employees?’ The hall erupted. I got a standing ovation. Lo and behold, it was the first thing on the six o’clock news.” Seven years later, Maura was RCN President when, for the first time, a sitting Prime Minister addressed Congress. It was Gordon Brown, and he was followed by David Cameron.

Although there’s been less of a political presence in recent years, Congress has become less London-centric, more inclusive and remains a vital way to bring together nursing voices. “You’re hearing from the frontlines, the lived experiences of nursing staff,” Maura says. “Those on the ground, and our reps and active members, spend a huge amount of time working – Congress energises them and brings their experience into the organisation.”

Continuing to improve Congress means encouraging a wide variety of delegates with different backgrounds and experiences to get involved, something Maura has always tried to do. “We need to nurture new talent,” she says. “I was encouraged by individuals at those earlier Congresses and that led to me stepping up. We should encourage others to speak and make sure everyone feels part of the UK nursing family.”

### Track the evolution of Congress

The RCN Library and Archive team has digitised Congress materials held in its collections, and shared this online in a new digital archive for members. There are programmes, newsletters, and audio and video recordings of debates across five decades. Visit [tinyurl.com/rcn-digital-archive](https://tinyurl.com/rcn-digital-archive)

Words by  
Rachael Healy.  
Picture of Maura  
(above) by  
John Behets

## Setting our direction

We're hosting a series of online debates, drawn from the 2020 RCN Congress programme, allowing members to have their say on key nursing issues

This autumn, members will be able to join online debates and share their opinions and experiences on topics vital to the nursing profession, shaping the work the RCN does to support members.

As *Activate* went to press, our Agenda Committee was set to meet to decide five events and five debates from the Congress programme to take place online, starting in September.

Chair of RCN Congress BJ Waltho said: "While it sadly has not been possible to hold RCN Congress in Liverpool this year, these virtual events will ensure we still open up discussion

and robust debate, allowing voices across our nursing membership to be heard.

"It is more crucial than ever that we discuss issues important to nursing staff, to help shape Council's work programme for the coming year."

The series of events will start with the Chair of Council and the chairs of the committees presenting the 2020 Council Report and answering questions from members.

For event dates and more information, visit [rcn.org.uk/congress](https://rcn.org.uk/congress)

### What Congress means to me

"My first Congress was in Bournemouth many years ago. I lived there and just went along. Since then, I've attended Congress in various roles – forum member, branch chair, agenda committee member, then vice chair and now chair of the event.

"I remember my first Congress and thinking – this is me. This is what being a member of the RCN is all about. It made sense to me. Members want the RCN to be member-led. In the week of Congress, everything is about members and I think it's the epitome of a member-led organisation. Everyone listens to the members and the whole energy comes from the members.



"My term of office has been extended for a year, so I'll be chair next year and I cannot wait. I think it will be awesome."

**BJ Waltho, Chair of RCN Congress**

## Speak up for members

Are you keen to represent your nursing colleagues and have your say on how nursing policy is implemented? Take a look at our current election and appointment opportunities

### RCN President and Deputy President

Our President and Deputy President are the RCN's public face, representing the College at all levels, both within the UK and abroad.

Both elections are for a term of office of two years beginning on 1 January 2021.

Nominations close on 20 July, so this is your last chance to put yourself forward.

### RCN country and regional boards

RCN boards advise and support their country or regional director in setting and delivering the RCN's local priorities.

Elections are taking place to elect members to all 12 country and regional boards with nominations open until 4 September.

### RCN UK Nursing Support Workers Committee

Eight seats are up for election on the RCN UK Nursing Support Workers Committee with nominations closing on 27 July. The committee represents and provides a voice for the RCN's health care assistants, health care support workers, assistant practitioners, nursing associates and trainee nursing associates.

### RCN rep committees

Elections are taking place to elect members to each of the three RCN UK rep committees, with nominations closing on 19 August. The committees represent the RCN's learning reps, safety reps and stewards. They advise on RCN policy relevant to their reps' area of expertise, and report through the Trade Union Governance Group to RCN Council.

### RCN forum steering committees

Twenty-nine of the RCN's forums are holding appointment processes for steering committee roles, with applications closing on 14 August.

Each RCN forum represents thousands of members and focuses on a different nursing specialism.

The role of the steering committee includes representing the forum's members and providing an expert voice for the specialty.

### Get involved

For more information and to put yourself forward for a governance role, visit [rcn.org.uk/elections](https://www.rcn.org.uk/elections)



Our Council, committees, boards and forums set the strategy and direction of the RCN. Taking on a governance role provides a great chance to become more involved with the College and to directly influence the issues that really matter to members and the wider nursing profession.

**Return address**  
RCN Direct, Copse Walk  
Cardiff Gate Business Park  
Cardiff, CF23 8X



## Personal injury services

RCN Law provides personal injury services for RCN members in England and Wales.

As an RCN member, you can get legal advice and representation for injuries sustained at work (including workplace disease) or outside of work, assault, stress, lifting and handling, and road traffic accidents. The service is free for members regardless of whether your claim is successful. If your claim is successful, you will keep all of your compensation.

## Will writing service

We spend our lives working to provide for ourselves and our loved ones, yet 57% of us do not have a will, meaning our loved ones may not be provided for should the worst happen. If you have a family, property, savings, insurance policies or personal belongings then you need to consider making a will.

### How can RCN Law help?

We provide a fast, efficient and friendly service at a discounted rate for members and very competitive rates for your family and friends. Unlike other providers who offer template wills, you will receive the services of legal professionals who will tailor a will to your needs.

Our fixed fee includes:

- a telephone conversation with one of our legal experts
- detailed legal advice to ensure the will meets your needs
- will drafting plus written advice and instructions
- free secure storage of your will.

Call RCN Law on **0345 772 6100** or visit  
[rcn.org.uk/personal-injury](http://rcn.org.uk/personal-injury) or [rcn.org.uk/wills](http://rcn.org.uk/wills)