

Activate

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News, views and support for RCN activists



Nursing at Brexit point

As *Activate* went to press, MPs were preparing to vote on the Brexit deal ahead of the UK leaving the European Union in March 2019. Whatever happens, the RCN has major concerns about what Brexit could mean for nursing staff.

Following a resolution that was passed at RCN Congress earlier this year, the RCN has been calling on party leaders to back a People's Vote on the final Brexit deal.

After the Brexit referendum in 2016, the RCN highlighted five key priorities to the UK Government to ensure that Brexit wouldn't harm nursing and health care services.

These are:

- **safeguarding the health and social care workforce** by having a strategy that includes social rights for EU nursing staff and allows for future migration
- **preserving regulations governing staff and medicines**, including a continuation of EU education standards which set minimum training hours for student nurses
- **addressing public health collaboratively**, particularly on communicable diseases and antimicrobial resistance

- **protecting decent working conditions**, so that employment rights set at EU level still apply to nursing staff in the UK
- **maintaining important opportunities for collaboration across Europe** on research and between nursing organisations to share and learn.

In October, the RCN said there had been "little or no progress" on all five of the areas. It is hosting an information event in parliament in December to help MPs and Peers from all political parties understand the impact that Brexit may have on the nursing profession across the UK.

This will enable the RCN to explain its priorities for Brexit and the action it wants the Government to take depending on whether or not a deal has been achieved by Prime Minister Theresa May. Parliamentarians will also be asked to support a People's Vote on the final Brexit deal.

Meanwhile, the RCN has welcomed news that EU nationals working in the UK will be granted settled status no matter what happens next with the Brexit deal. The Home Office has agreed to prioritise the applications of health and social care staff in a national pilot of the scheme. See page 2 for more.

RCN welcomes settled status pilot



As *Activate* went to press, the Home Office was due to launch a UK-wide pilot of the EU Settlement Scheme.

The pilot prioritises applications from EU citizens working in health and social care and allows them to apply to continue living in the UK after 31 December 2020.

The RCN is committed to supporting its members through the process. Advice for EU nursing staff on their eligibility for the scheme can be found at tinyurl.com/rcn-eu-rights. Members can also contact the RCN Immigration Service for help and advice.

Valerie Bailey, Head of RCN Membership Support Services, said: “The roll out of this pilot scheme provides much-needed reassurance to EU health care staff and we welcome this opportunity for EU nursing staff to plan their futures.”

While the RCN is pleased the Government has listened to its call to prioritise the applications of health care staff, there is concern it has come too late. Since the Brexit vote in 2016 there have been almost 9,000 fewer new registrations from EU nurses and midwives to the NMC register.

How to get involved with staff side

A new resource is available to support all reps to be more active on staff side

Staff side brings together different unions and, sometimes, recognised professional bodies, within an organisation so that workplace issues can be addressed collectively. All RCN reps should be active on staff side and now there's new guidance to help. The guidance, which was produced by RCN reps and staff, includes personal stories, tips on how to get started and a quiz which will help reps decide how active they want to be on staff side.

Phil Noyes, RCN steward and chair of his trust's staff side (pictured), says: “Many of us find ourselves taking on a role within staff side that is unexpected so it was clear that we

needed to provide more support for reps. This is an excellent aid for everyone who wants to take on more responsibility, boosting understanding of the consultative and negotiating processes of multi-union work.”

Rachel Morris, RCN regional officer says: “This resource will help all reps to gain a better understanding of the key roles and responsibilities of staff side and how to undertake strategic partnership working. It will also be really useful for reps working in the independent sector who may not have a staff side committee but who work directly in partnership with employers.”

Working Together: Being Active on Staff Side is available at rcn.org.uk/publications (code 007153)

NHS Band 1 update

From 1 December, as part of the 2018 NHS pay deal for England, all posts in the NHS in England will only be filled at Band 2 and above. This means that the minimum pay rate in the NHS will be above the living wage. Existing Band 1 staff will be offered the opportunity

to develop their role and transition to Band 2. Training and support will be offered, but moving to a Band 2 role will not be compulsory. Frequently asked questions and guidance have been published on NHS Employers' website. Visit tinyurl.com/nhsemployers-band1

Festive safe staffing resource for reps in Scotland



Members in Scotland are being encouraged to ask for more for nursing this Christmas

Activists have been sent an advent calendar with 24 messages highlighting the importance of staffing for safe and effective care as part of the RCN Scotland's *Ask for More* campaign.

The advent calendar is the latest resource for reps to help them raise the visibility of the campaign in workplaces across the country. It follows a focus on safe staffing and the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill at the recent RCN Scotland reps conference.

Around 60 stewards, learning reps and safety reps came together at the annual event in Edinburgh to share ideas and experiences. Each rep finished the session by making a personal commitment to act to support the *Ask for More* campaign, ranging from gathering personal stories to holding local information stands.

Look out for the advent calendar in your workplace and remember to encourage fellow members and nursing staff in Scotland to show their support at rcn.org.uk/askformore or follow the campaign on Twitter @RCNScot

Book now for RCN Congress 2019



Don't miss the most important nursing event of the year

Next year, RCN Congress is taking place in Liverpool from Sunday 19 to Thursday 23 May. The event brings nurses, HCAs, APs, TNAs and nursing students together to take part in the UK's largest nursing conference and exhibition.

Booking is now open with free places available to all RCN members. Visit rcn.org.uk/congress

Congress deadlines approaching

You can help make next year's Congress the best yet by submitting an idea for an agenda item or fringe event.

If you've got an important nursing issue that needs addressing on a national scale then

Congress is your chance to be heard. Make sure you submit the issue as an idea to be debated at Congress before the deadline of 6 January.

Congress agenda item suggestions can come from RCN boards, branches, forums or representative committee members. Email congressagenda@rcn.org.uk if you're not sure who to contact or visit rcn.org.uk/congress/agenda/submit-an-agenda-item

Anyone who is a member of an RCN forum, board, branch, network or group can submit a proposal for a fringe event. The closing date for applications is 5pm on 9 January. Find out more at rcn.org.uk/congress/about/submit-a-congress-fringe-event

Turn to page 6 to read our interview with Chair of RCN Congress BJ Waltho and find out what she's looking for in agenda item submissions.

Amy's Council role



Amy Fancourt, an MSc Adult and Mental Health Nursing student at City University, London, has been elected as Student Member of RCN Council and will take up the role from 1 January 2019.

Amy, who has a background as a health care assistant in mental health and as a community carer, says: "Thank you to everyone who voted for me and others in this election. I promise I will do my best to represent you, empower you, and not let the student voice go unheard. I'm incredibly excited to take on this role and work with students to improve the future of nurse education."

During her time on RCN Council Amy will represent over 35,000 RCN student members and will help decide on the future direction of the College.

Health unions reject Northern Ireland pay offer



The RCN, alongside other health trade unions in Northern Ireland, has rejected a pay offer by the Department of Health. The one-year deal, which was proposed

without being agreed by trade unions, would have given a large number of staff a 1.5% pay rise, which is below the rate of inflation.

In a statement rejecting the offer, co-signed by Director of RCN Northern Ireland Janice Smyth, the joint unions explain that the offer does not meet the expectations of their members.

The statement reads: "Unlike England, Scotland and Wales, this offer does not deliver a three-year pay deal. Neither does it meet the joint

trade unions' formal proposal for an interim pay increase, or address the equal pay issues that have been identified in the pay framework."

The announcement followed a consultation with joint union members, asking whether they would be prepared to be balloted formally on taking industrial action over the continuing absence of a pay award for Health and Social Care (HSC) service staff.

Between 92% and 98% of those who responded indicated that they wished to be balloted if the HSC staff side organisations are unable to reach agreement with the Department and employers. The RCN will now be consulting its members about next steps.

This information was correct when Activate went to press on 5 December. For the latest updates, visit rcn.org.uk/northernireland

RCN Council election results

Voting for the casual vacancies on RCN Council closed on 11 December. Those elected will start their one-year terms of office on 1 January 2019.

To find out who has been elected to the 11 vacant seats, visit rcn.org.uk/news

What activism means to me



Looking back on her four years as RCN President, Cecilia Akrisie Anim talks about what activism means to her

Activism encompasses many things. It's about improving care and making sure it's safe for patients. It's about working with employers to ensure the environment is safe and fair for nursing staff. And, importantly, it's about giving nursing staff a voice to ask for what they need to do their jobs effectively.

Activism is also about personal growth. My experience and training as an RCN activist has helped me to face the challenges in my own life with confidence and courage. When challenges arise, I make sure I find a solution as I would do for members.

Being the first black person to be elected to the role of RCN President is a great achievement. It's been an exciting journey, and a busy one as I've continued to work on the frontline too. The thing I love most about being President is that I'm able to be there for members, and in doing so, allow them to be there for patients. I've visited so many members during my time as President and my message to them is always the same – get involved. The RCN is its members and we need everyone on board. I know you, our activists, are out there spreading this message too.

My highlights as President include celebrating our centenary and our successful fight to scrap the 1% cap on NHS pay. I'm stepping down as President but not out of nursing or activism.

"I'm stepping down as President but not out of nursing or activism"

ASK AN ADVISER



Flexible working



Where can members find advice?

Flexible working arrangements help to create a healthy work-life balance for employees and their families. Good employers recognise the benefits of flexible working, which include recruiting and retaining the best staff, and reducing staff absence and work-related stress.

Some of the flexible working options available include part-time working, flexi-time, compressed hours, job-shares, term-time working, career breaks and working from home.

RCN Direct receives a lot of calls about this topic. However, there's detailed information available online, including a step-by-step guide on how to prepare for flexible working and what to expect. The guidance also outlines what to consider before applying for flexible working, how to apply and the employer's duties and responsibilities. In addition, it provides information about when members will need to call us for local support (for example meetings, appeals and disputes).

Visit tinyurl.com/rcn-flexible-working

For more information, speak in confidence to an RCN Direct adviser any time between 8.30am and 8.30pm, 365 days per year.

RCN DIRECT
www.rcn.org.uk/direct
0345 772 6100



View from the frontline



Raising your recruitment game

These days, employers in health care services are trying to recruit from an ever-shrinking pool of registered nurses. Recently, I was struck by the way my employer was using posters and flyers to sell itself as the best local hospital to work for. The posters made no mention of the many good reasons nurses might want to work for us. Frustrated, I set about addressing the problem.

Having been a steward and safety rep for many years, I already had a good working relationship with the heads of occupational health and HR, as well as many of the local managers. I knew that we had recently met “achievement” level status as a healthy workplace through the Mayor of London scheme and that we had lobbied hard for a staff physio to help employees with musculoskeletal problems come back to work earlier. We also have many other staff benefits such as a discounted bike purchase scheme and a trust choir.

I chatted to my colleagues about what else the trust and the RCN offers members working in our organisation and we came up with a list of 68 benefits that anybody joining us can take advantage of. Online information has been updated and I’m working with my HR colleagues to see if the posters can be updated in the future so they can truly reflect all of the great things our trust has to offer. In this day and age, where staff can usually get jobs anywhere they want to, you have to raise your recruitment game.

Mike Smith, RCN UK Stewards Committee member

It’s all about the message

You may have read about the outcome of the legal case involving the owners of a bakery in Northern Ireland who refused to bake a cake in support of gay marriage. The case looked at whether their refusal was discrimination on the grounds of religious and political belief or sexual orientation.

Ashers bakery is run by a Christian family who hold the religious belief that marriage can only be between a man and a woman. Mr Lee, a gay man who volunteers for the LGBT community in Belfast, asked the bakery to make a cake with the message “Support gay marriage”. His order was initially accepted but a few days later the owner called him to explain his order couldn’t be completed because the bakery was a Christian business and couldn’t produce a cake with that message.

Mr Lee made a discrimination claim which was upheld in the county court because the message on the cake couldn’t be separated from sexual orientation which is a protected characteristic. The Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland agreed albeit for a different reason. However, the bakery owners then appealed to the Supreme Court which decided it wasn’t discrimination after all.

The Supreme Court said the owners objected to the message and not Mr Lee’s sexual orientation or anyone he associated with. It concluded the owners would have refused to supply the cake regardless of any customer’s personal characteristics. Furthermore, infringement of their right to express religious and/or political beliefs in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights couldn’t be justified by requiring them to produce a cake with a message they deeply disagreed with. This case serves as a reminder that claims of discrimination are often not as straightforward as they appear.

Joanne Galbraith-Marten
RCN Head of Legal
(Employment)



Five minutes with BJ Waltho...

You have three weeks left to submit an agenda item for Congress 2019. As the deadline approaches, we catch up with the new Chair of RCN Congress BJ Waltho to find out what the Agenda Committee is looking for

What are your hopes for Congress 2019?

I hope, as I do every year, that people who attend feel as though it's been a really good use of their time; that they've learnt something, they've networked and most importantly, that they're reinvigorated. We know that nursing today is not an easy job so I want Congress to give people the energy and enthusiasm to carry on their fantastic work.

Obviously, I also hope I do a good job because it's my first Congress as Chair and Stuart's (McKenzie, former Chair of RCN Congress) shoes are hard to fill.

How important is the agenda?

The agenda is "it". It's the framework upon which the success of everything else hinges. If it's thought-provoking, inclusive, and generates good discussion and debate then that will have a knock-on effect. The fringe events will benefit, the speakers will benefit – the agenda is like a furnace that provides an energy for the whole of Congress.

What do you and the Agenda Committee look for in an agenda item?

First and foremost, the issue needs to be current. It should be something that affects us or our patients and the care we provide. We're looking for issues that appeal across the whole spectrum of nursing.

The biggest mistake you can make is to think that someone else will submit an item on an issue because people are talking about it. That's not the case so, if you're thinking about something that needs discussion on a national level, get your submission in now. My dream is for every single entity to send at least one submission. It would be a first but it would be brilliant.

"The agenda is like a furnace that provides an energy for the whole of Congress"



Do you have any tips for submitting agenda items?

Keep it simple. Try to make the proposed wording as short as possible and then provide the background in your supporting information. Don't assume that the Agenda Committee will know about your topic, especially if it's slightly unique to your field of practice or the country you live in. That's why your supporting information is so important – because it gives you the opportunity to tell us what we need to know.

How does it feel to be Chair of Congress?

I don't take the role lightly. It's a huge responsibility to carry because so many people are giving up their time and I really want them to feel like their investment is worth it. That said, it's the highlight of my nursing career. I'm coming towards the end of my career now, so it's a nice way to end.

It's been a difficult year for the RCN and a lot of people have lost some faith in the College. I want Congress to restore some of that by showing everything that's good about the RCN and its members. Congress is a chance to hear about all of the phenomenal work members do and to recognise the difference that they make to their patients every single day.

Submit your idea now

Suggestions for potential agenda items can be submitted by RCN boards, branches, forums or representative committee members. Simply complete the form at rcn.org.uk/congress.

The closing date for submissions is 6 January 2019.

Visit tinyurl.com/rcn-agenda-tips for more tips on what makes a good agenda item.

Looking at the bigger picture New training programme for branch and board committee members

From January, a new learning and development programme will be available for all board and branch committee members. Helen Inskip, a former branch secretary who took part in the pilot sessions, tells us why she found it so valuable

The Committee Member Learning and Development Programme is designed to help branch and board committee members better understand the structure of the RCN and how their role fits within it. It highlights the differences between the roles of board and branch members and demonstrates how members in these roles can work together.

The programme includes a one-day foundation course for new committee members and a one-day development module for existing committee members.

Helen Inskip, who is now a member of the RCN UK Stewards Committee, attended both sessions

“It helps you to understand what’s expected of you and what you can expect of others”

as part of the pilot programme when she was branch secretary for the East Midlands region.

Helen says: “For the foundation module, we looked at the overall governance structure of the RCN. I think it can be quite complicated to understand where your particular board, branch or committee sits within the grand scheme of things so this made it much clearer. We also learnt about the NOLAN principles - seven ethical standards which all committee members should sign up to in order to carry out their role to the best of their ability.”

For the development module, attendees were divided into groups depending on their particular role. “This was really valuable because the programme outlined exactly what was expected of you,” says Helen. “We learnt about effective leadership strategies and how to engage with members. We also looked at how to link priorities – national priorities, regional priorities and branch priorities – and talked about ways we could bring all of these together.”

Creating consistency

Previously, training for board and branch committee members has been carried out locally but this new national programme aims to bring consistency across the countries and regions, and Helen says it has other benefits too. “There was quite a mix of people in attendance which was great for networking,” she explains. “I was able to connect with staff from different branches to see how they were doing things and what was working well in their area.”

The programme is open to all branch and board committee members and Helen thinks no matter what your level of experience, it is worth attending: “I’d highly recommend the programme to anyone. I already had a lot of experience in a branch role when I attended but it was still so valuable and it has been valuable for my role on the RCN UK Stewards Committee too. It makes you look at your own behaviour and helps you to understand what’s expected of you and what you can expect of others.

“It gives you an understanding of how you fit into the bigger RCN picture and how everyone can work together to achieve the best for members.”



Book your place for next year

We’ll be running three foundation modules – one each in the north of England, south of England and the Midlands - for newly elected board and branch committee members. Regional staff will invite new committee members following the outcome of recent elections.

Each RCN country and region will be delivering a development module for all board and branch committee members from next year. Members will be invited by their respective country or region to take part.

NOTICEBOARD

Salary overpayments



Helping members to negotiate repayment

The RCN Welfare Service helps members with salary overpayment cases when the overpayment is not disputed by the member.

Often, employers will try to recover an overpayment across the same amount of time that overpayments occurred. So for example, if someone was overpaid for six months, they would need to repay the total amount over six months. Sometimes employers try to recover overpaid salary without adjusting tax or National Insurance through the PAYE (pay as you earn) system, so members should look carefully at the overpayment calculations before agreeing any repayments.

Members may have other financial obligations, so repaying an unaffordable sum can lead to falling into arrears with rent or a mortgage. The RCN Welfare Service can advise on how to avoid this.

In the first instance, members should read the guidance at tinyurl.com/rcnoverpayment. If members have undisputed salary overpayments and need advice to negotiate affordable repayment plans, they can call RCN Direct who will refer them to the RCN Welfare Service.

Nominations for RCN Awards are open



Do you know an exceptional activist? If so, why not nominate them for our RCN Rep and SIO of the Year awards?

Every year at RCN Congress we celebrate activists who have made a real difference in their workplace or university and have shown outstanding commitment to the RCN and its members.

There are four categories specifically honouring active members; three for RCN reps (learning rep of the year, safety rep of the year and steward of the year) and one for SIOs (student information officer of the year).

Shortlisted candidates from each category will be invited to attend an awards ceremony at Congress 2019 in Liverpool and the winners will receive £500.

Members can also be nominated for the RCN Award of Merit which recognises voluntary service that has gone above and beyond to support RCN members. RCN Fellowships recognise individuals who have made an exceptional commitment to advancing the science and practice of nursing.

All RCN members can submit nominations, so spread the word to make sure your colleagues get the recognition they deserve. The closing date for nominations is 1 February 2019. Visit rcn.org.uk/rcnawards to submit a nomination or find out more.

RCN Wales library

Have you visited the RCN Wales library yet?

With trained librarians and a friendly service, the RCN Wales library in Cardiff provides members with a full library service, supporting them to find what they need and helping with research and literature searches. The staff also regularly host events and workshops, such as a recent workshop on improving Wikipedia editor skills.

“RCN Wales library does everything a library should do and more,” says regular visitor and RCN Wales Board Member Professor Donna Mead. “We want to make sure members in Wales and the rest of the UK know what it has to offer so they can make use of this fantastic resource whenever they have the chance.”

To find out more visit rcn.org.uk/library

Tools of the trade



Increasing awareness of mental health, reducing stigma and supporting people to seek help early are recognised as crucial strategies for a mentally healthy workplace. The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) has published a report exploring the use of mental health first aid in the workplace. Download the report at tinyurl.com/iosh-mhfa

According to new guidance, occupational asthma accounts for up to 15% of all cases of adult-onset asthma. Find advice for employers and workers at tinyurl.com/asthma-at-work

Figures published by the Health and Safety Executive show the number of fatal injuries to workers over the age of 60 is at the highest it's been in over a decade. IOSH says this highlights the need for greater workplace precautions to protect older workers. Read more at tinyurl.com/iosh-over60

A report commissioned by the Cavendish Coalition examines how the health and social care workforce in the UK will be affected post-Brexit. Visit tinyurl.com/NHSEmployers-Brexit