

PROTECTING WORKERS' RIGHTS

Royal College of Nursing

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and third sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and providing members with learning and development opportunities. With over 40,000 members in Scotland, the RCN is the voice of nursing.

RCN Position

The RCN strongly opposed the Trade Union Act 2016. The Act has serious consequences for productivity and staff morale in the NHS.

Facility time

In Scotland, trade union facilities arrangements within the NHS are agreed through the national Partnership information network (PIN) guidelines (Scottish Government, 2011) and form part of the NHS Staff Governance framework. Facility time has shown to be beneficial to the safety of practice environments, staff welfare and, consequently, patients.

The Department for Trade and Industry's 2007 review of union facility time echoed the findings of the RCN's research, based on analysis of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey, which found cost savings associated with union representation. It concluded that union activity is associated with:

- lower voluntary exit rates, saving £72-£143 million annually in recruitment costs, and lower dismissal rates, saving £107-£213 million annually in recruitment costs
- lower rates of employment tribunals, saving the Government £22-£43 million annually
- lower rates of workplace related injuries, saving employers £126-£371 million annually and
- lower incidences of workplace-related illness, saving employers £45-£207 million annually.

Facility time for union representatives is linked to increased productivity, crucial in the NHS for delivering high quality, cost effective care.

Trade unions invest in their representatives bringing skills, knowledge and experience to the workplace and to partnership. This is a cost effective way of developing practice and managing organisations. Without this, alternative provision would be costly to employers and the tax payer.

Improving patient care

Health care employees, union representatives and employers share a common goal to improve services and deliver high quality patient care.

Productive partnerships between union representatives and managers are made possible because of the provision of facility time.

Positive industrial relations enable situations to be resolved before they escalate. Ahead of the 2016 Act being passed, the RCN warned that any reduction in union facility time would reduce the ability of union representatives to carry out their roles, weaken union/employer partnerships and intensify the potential for industrial unrest.

Evidence showed that arrangements for union facility time were working well and the RCN believes that in the interests of patient care and staff welfare they should not be capped.

Further information sources

Independent research commissioned by RCN into facility time can be found [here](#).

The Department for Trade and Industry's 2007 review of union facility time can be found [here](#).

If you would like any further information please contact Sarah Atherton, Public Affairs Officer, by email at sarah.atherton@rcn.org.uk or by telephone 0131 662 6172.