



Royal College  
of Nursing

# RCN Library and Archive Service

## Review of the year 2023



Foreword.....	3
Facts and figures .....	4
Summary .....	6
Publication and conferences .....	6
Service development .....	7
Learning and teaching .....	8
Marketing and social media .....	10
Marketing.....	10
Social media.....	10
Events programme .....	11
Project in focus – children and young people (CYP) volunteering project.....	12
Collections overview.....	13
Archives .....	15
Country libraries.....	16
RCN Wales Library and Information Service .....	16
Northern Ireland Library and Information Zone.....	16
RCN Scotland Learning Hub.....	17
Project in focus – virtual reading room .....	19
Industrial action.....	20



## Foreword



The Royal College of Nursing Library and Archive Service is a fundamental part of what the RCN offers its members. It supports all members and staff, and provides a record of the history of nursing. So, I am delighted to present its Review of the Year 2023, in what was another year of real progress for the College.

The beginning of 2023 for the RCN was dominated by industrial action. I joined just before those strikes and was so impressed by how the whole College pulled together. The Library and Archive Service (LAS) dedicated over 1,000 hours to supporting our industrial action, alongside other RCN staff. The range of activities it was involved in was wide – from ward walking and organising hospital stands, to providing administrative support on strike committees, picket supervision and collecting items for the archive and collections.

The LAS welcomes everyone interested in nursing and its history, and in 2023 launched the children and young people’s nursing exhibition, which was its first volunteer co-curated exhibition. This co-curation ensured

the content was truly focussed on providing a great visitor experience. I’m pleased to report that the process was unexpectedly popular. This work has been presented at several conferences and is an excellent example of helping to make nursing accessible to all.

The LAS has great expertise in developing its collections and has added to them in significant ways in 2023. It added “Transforming to nursing practice” by Sage following some strong negotiation by the team. It’s a much-needed resource which most members can’t normally access, and so it has been well used. Additionally, the service launched its virtual reading room, which allows members and researchers to access our special collections remotely via a Teams meeting. It’s a fantastic resource and the technology allows members to see rare items, zoom in, clip and examine at their leisure. It really helps to open our collections to those unable to visit them at RCN HQ in London.


The RCN archive has also played an important part in identifying and retaining key records relating to COVID-19. This is vitally important for internal knowledge, and the archive has been proactively collecting and encouraging appropriate record-keeping across the organisation. As well as collecting for the corporate memory of the RCN, the archive is collecting to ensure that we can demonstrate the position of the College and its members in relation to significant issues throughout the pandemic. This includes contributing towards the COVID-19 public inquiries – a hugely important role for the College on behalf of our members.


2023 was another great year for the LAS, and I urge all members and staff to take advantage of its fantastic resources.


Nicola Ranger  
General Secretary and Chief Executive


## Facts and figures


### Enquiries and social media

 1,238 e-mail enquiries


 975 telephone enquiries

 1,959 webchat enquiries

 920 in-person enquiries


 5,754 X followers


 1,261 Facebook followers


 1,162 Instagram followers

 8,979 newsletter subscribers


### Events and exhibitions

 1,672 attendees at events


 56 events held

 6,720 visitors to online exhibitions

### Collections


 1,877 print and e-books added to the collection


 23,498 individuals using e-library


 199,412 full-text journal articles downloaded


 15,266 e-books accessed

### Learning and teaching

 405 member literature searches

 264 attendees at 1:1 Library Support Clinic training sessions

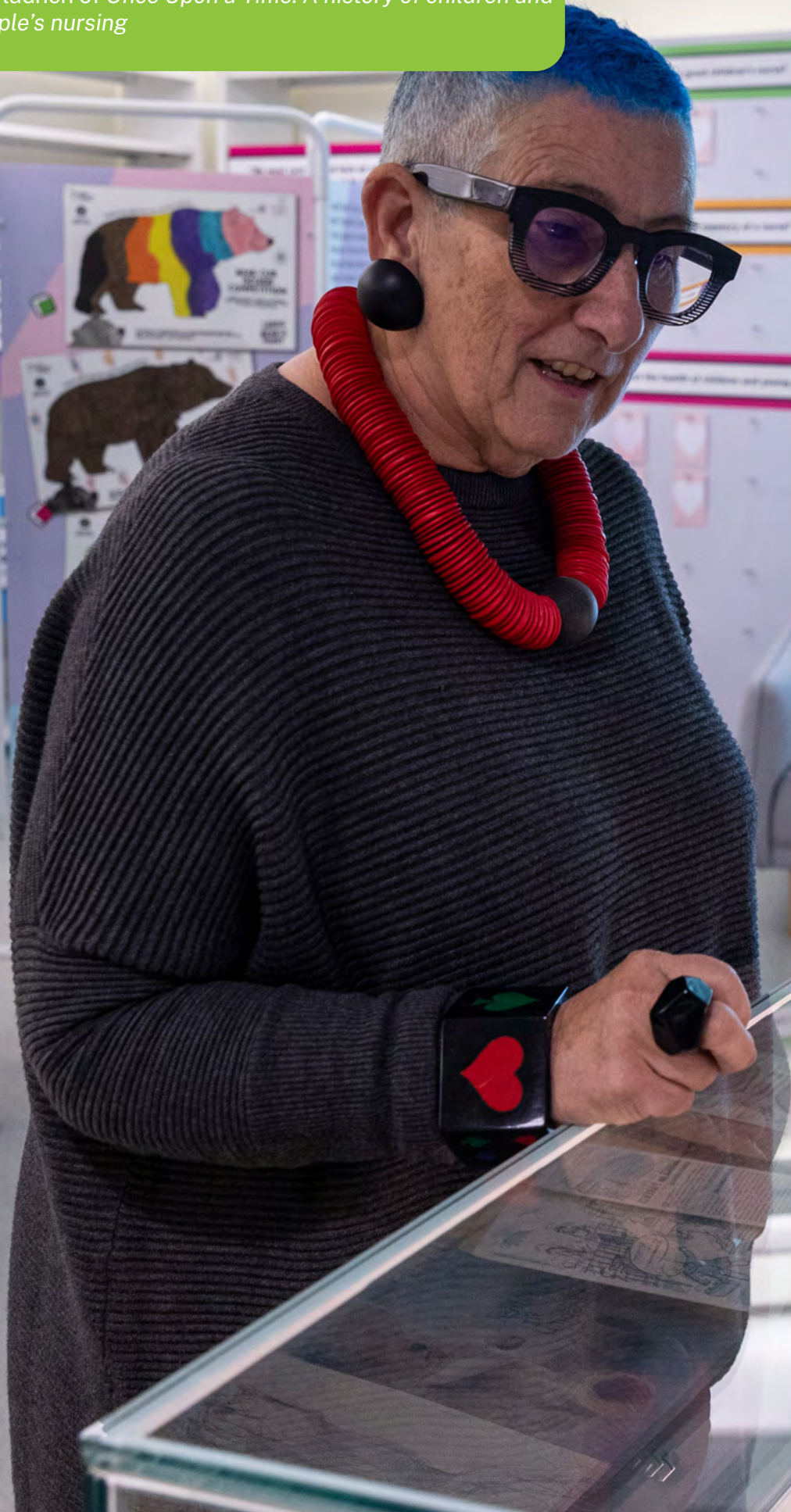
 242 attendees at online group sessions

 316 at education, learning and development (ELD) evidence and information sessions

“

This was the best ever event I've attended at the RCN”

Exhibition launch of *Once Upon a Time: A history of children and young people's nursing*



# Summary

## Publications and conferences

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Library and Archive Service (LAS) had an incredibly busy year in 2023, as we were proactive to assist during the industrial action. However, we still managed an impressive amount of conference speaking and publishing. The information team began a column in the *British Journal of Healthcare Assistants* promoting our information literacy and collections, which is continuing monthly in 2024. The library events and exhibitions team maximised the impact of their new volunteer partnership approach

to exhibitions, speaking at the Museum Collections Group about this model of co-creation. They also gave presentations at 2 conferences about their project to capture the lived experiences of nurses who worked through the pandemic. The RCN Archives published articles on oral histories and digitising special collections. They also gave a joint presentation with a member of the RCN History of Nursing Forum at the Archives and Records Association Conference entitled *Caring and Sharing our Nursing Archive*.



“Awesome presentation and speakers”

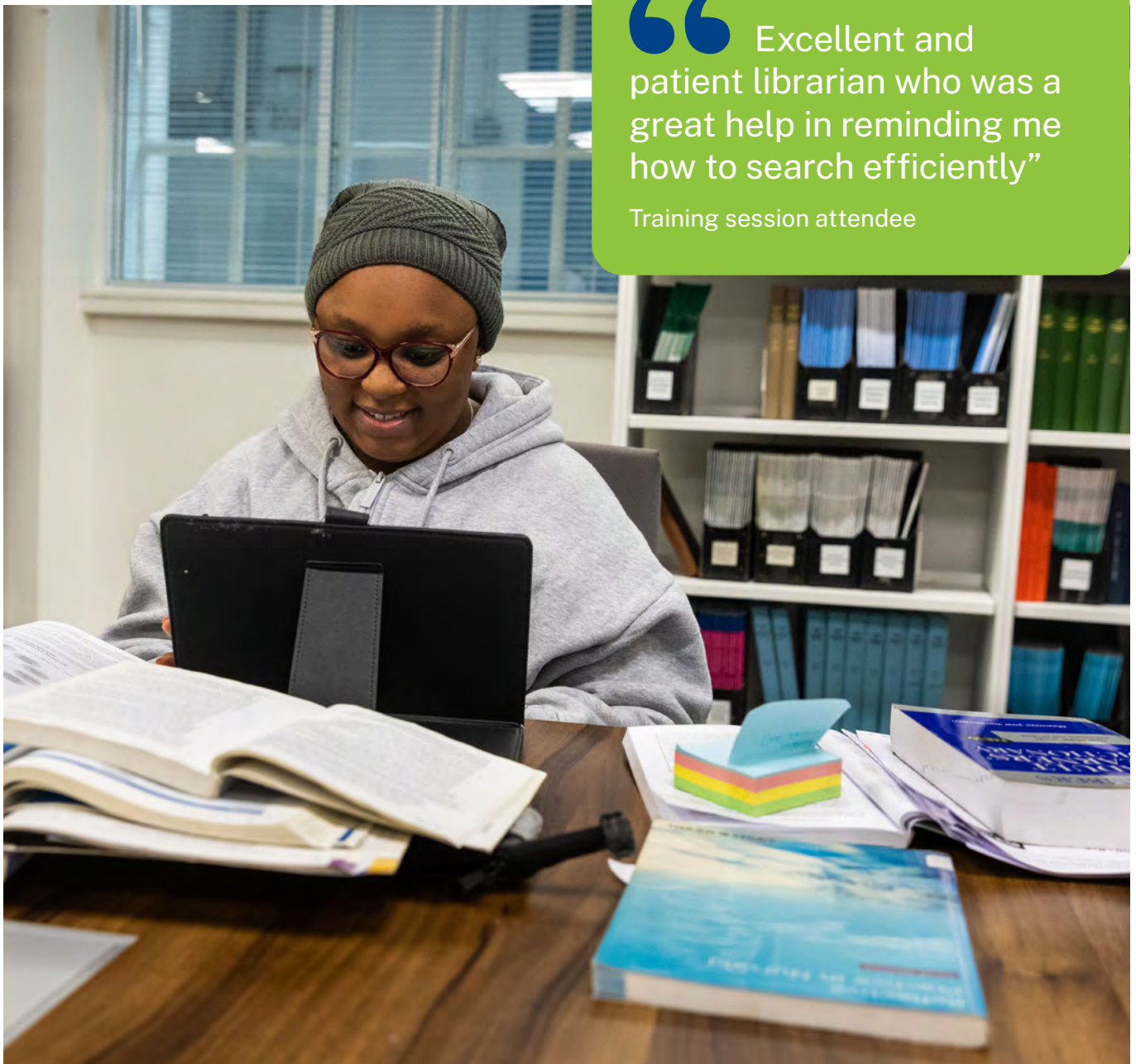
Nursing Beyond Borders attendee

## Service development

Since the pandemic the RCN library has had a focus on member self-care, and in 2023 we launched our new Members' Wellbeing Area in the mezzanine lounge. We encourage members to take some time out to play one of our games, help us complete our jigsaw puzzle, or simply relax with a book. We created a book swap, where members and library staff can take a book to read at home and replace it with another donated book, and mindful colouring books and pencils are provided for all to enjoy. We began providing free period products in the

library toilets, and noise-cancelling headphones can be borrowed for use in the library in addition to our regular headphones.

We implemented a ChatBot to supplement our live webchat service. When library staff are not available to respond to webchats out of hours, our automated ChatBot can answer basic queries and point towards useful resources. If the ChatBot is unable to resolve a query, members can leave a message and library staff will respond the next day.



“Excellent and patient librarian who was a great help in reminding me how to search efficiently”

Training session attendee

## Learning and teaching

The information team saw very high rates of usage, completing the most literature searches and member training sessions in a year since 2019. We worked closely with other RCN teams to support the Developing Leadership Programme, delivering interactive and engaging library skills training to attendees throughout the year. We continued our popular “Know how ...” and “... in 30 minutes” sessions, with our best-attended training session being “Easy referencing ... in 30 minutes”. Our one-to-one appointments were also in high demand, totalling 212 sessions for the year.

Alongside this surge in usage, we reviewed and updated the member literature search request form in collaboration with all 4 country libraries. This ensures we are asking the right questions that enable us to tailor search results to individual members and has helped to minimise back-and-forth discussions and create a more streamlined member experience. We also set up an automated literature search request form for RCN staff, using Microsoft Forms to help process these requests efficiently and ensure we have all the necessary details to accurately complete searches.

Providing support to staff remained a priority. We joined RCN staff in supporting RCN Congress 2023, delivering literature searches, and creating reading lists for each Resolution and Matter for Discussion to help members familiarise themselves with key issues. We embedded our Evidence Search Summaries service for RCN staff, where we produce a written summary of key points from the literature to support evidence based practice, and will promote this more widely in 2024. We introduced safe staffing literature updates for RCN staff to support organisational priorities around nursing workforce issues and aim to produce these on a more regular basis in 2024.

We started a refresh of our self-help resources with new CINAHL video tutorials, which have already been well used. This work will continue in 2024 with library search video tutorials and user guides, to ensure we have comprehensive online support at the point of need.

“ Very informative, very inclusive, and a very safe place to learn. Both tutors were extremely knowledgeable”

Report writing with the RLF attendee





“ Studying and working full time has been a challenge for me, especially with my disability. Professional staff who care about people. Thank you all so much, I greatly appreciate your support”

Training session attendee



# Marketing and social media

## Marketing

We had to scale back our marketing activities due to library staff providing support for RCN industrial action. However, we still promoted our new Members' Wellbeing Area on social media and within the space itself, as a news item on our website as well as a feature post on our library newsletter. Another focus in 2023 was completing a census of our library users, to better understand who is using which areas of our service. We aimed to capture all instances of service use, from online and in-person enquiries to usage of online books and journals, attendance at events, and more. We will make improvements based on our findings in 2024.

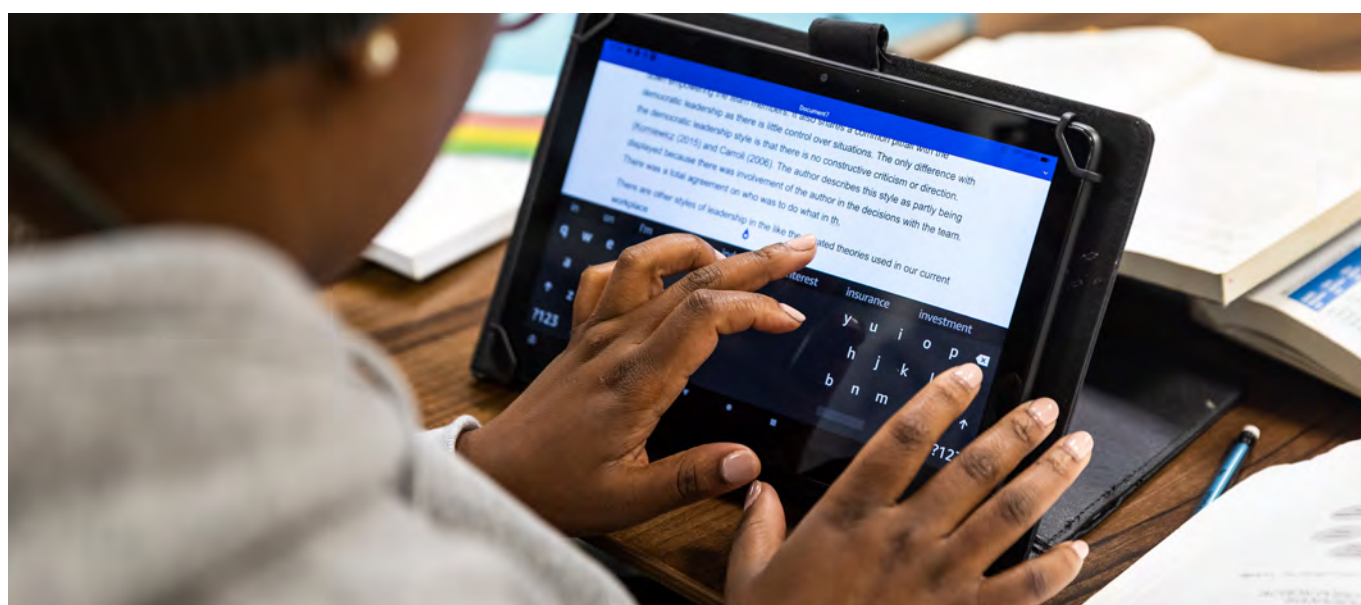
We continued to promote the webchat service and recorded an 85% increase in webchats received, corresponding to a total of 1,959 chats in 2023.

Our outreach work increased significantly in 2023. The team attended nearly 50 student recruitment events and a further 48 general outreach events, with the majority being in-person rather than online. We spoke to thousands of student nurses about the benefits of the RCN and our library service and welcomed many new students to the library.

## Social media

We focused on Instagram as our main social media channel and boosted our content, creating stories and reels in addition to picture posts leading to a 10% increase in followers. We continued to use X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, and gained followers on both platforms. However, our social media mirrored wider sector trends and we recorded a reduction in interactions. We achieved our highest engagement levels when posting

about historical items from our collections. Our Halloween series told the tales of conflated midwives, healers and witches with plates from our pamphlet collection. Another highlight was a post for Hanukah, inviting followers to look for the menorah detailed in our stained-glass Nursing Life triptych. The team was delighted by Michael Rosen's engagement with an *Unmasked: Real Stories of Nursing in COVID-19* exhibition post.



## Events programme

This year was monumental for the library events and exhibitions team, as we officially became a museum when we were granted “Working Towards Accreditation” status by Arts Council England.

Our event series returned to capacity, with 2 new exhibitions and a full range of in-person, hybrid and virtual events. In May, we launched an exhibition: *Unmasked: Real Stories of Nursing in COVID-19*. The team engaged with RCN members to deliver an impactful and emotional display, including a doodle wall created by artist Federica Ciotti and RCN members, and objects and stories loaned by nursing staff. We also collaborated with China Plate Theatre on a new sound art work, *Humans Not Heroes*, which was developed through workshops with RCN members.

Our event series included a new project with dance group Digital Umbilical, funded by Arts Council England. The event saw us host movement and wellbeing workshops around the country, culminating in a performance exploring empathy through dance. We launched our digitised collection of international nursing

papers at an event chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of the International Council of Nurses, Howard Catton and held joint events with the Migration Museum (chaired by Gary Younge) and the Black Frontline project.

In autumn, we launched our second exhibition of the year: *Once Upon a Time: A History of Children and Young People’s Nursing*. This featured an arts project with 2 children’s hospital schools (Oxfordshire and London), presenting children’s views of the ideal nurse and ward, and a display of artwork from Leeds Hospitals Charity. The busy launch event was attended by several young people who are considering becoming nurses. At the Being Human Festival we launched a new poem by nurse and poet Molly Case, exploring children’s experiences of care in the past and present.

We obtained funding from the London Arts and Humanities Partnership for a PhD student to explore the voices of Black nurses in our collections, starting in 2024. We also successfully hosted our first intern from Queen Mary University of London, helping to prepare them for a career in museums.



## Project in focus – children and young people (CYP) volunteering project

We found new ways of working with members to deliver our services in 2023, including our first dedicated volunteering programme. Six months before the launch of the exhibition *Once Upon a Time: A History of Children and Young People's Nursing*, we advertised for members through our RCN Children and Young People Forum and our RCN History of Nursing Forum who wanted to develop new skills and share their knowledge through a series of training opportunities and focus groups. We initially hoped to find up to 8 volunteers to participate. This aim was far exceeded, with 37 members taking part across the series.

Members received training in research, handling and interpretation of historic material for a general audience, working directly with our unique collections and items elsewhere. Most of the sessions were online, meaning that nursing professionals from around the country could contribute to discussions and share ideas for the exhibition, with many writing their own text and object labels and loaning exhibits.

We ended up with a core group of 12 volunteers, who all carried out individual research and text writing, with the rest of the group attending occasional sessions and submitting ideas by email. Most were practicing or retired CYP nurses, with a few adult nurses and students from other fields. Six of the team have spoken at or chaired events, and some have gone on to speak about their research elsewhere and have considered writing it up for publication.

“ Doing this research has reignited my passion for children’s nursing. Thank you very much to you and your colleagues for your encouragement”

Louise, research volunteer



## Collections overview

We closed 2023 with a bang, by clinching the deal to give our members access to the Transforming Nursing Practice eBook series published by SAGE. This series comprises 63 titles all on key areas of nursing and is perfect for students studying for their nursing qualification. All titles are linked to the NMC 2018 *Standards of proficiency for registered nurses*. Negotiations were ongoing throughout 2023, as providing access was a significant financial investment.

In 2023, the collections team focused on our print book collections, with the whole library team completing the first stock check since 2019. We weeded the library's open shelf print

stock to maintain its currency. The team also reviewed usage of all our main databases and online journals, and we were pleased to see healthy figures, proving that our members are making active use of all our subscribed-to content.

We completed the protective boxing of our rare book collection and then started a preservation project to protect the physical copies of the RCN's published output, of which the library holds a complete collection. We continued our digitisation programme by sending the unique RCN student newspaper *Snap*, which dates from the 1970s, to be digitised. It is now available in digital format.



“ The search results came quickly and that was really helpful. It was simple to fill in the request form too”

RCN member using the literature search service



“ I thoroughly enjoyed this session; it was interactive and practical. Lovely to learn something new”

Event attendee

## Archives

The RCN's Archive Accreditation Award, which we have held since 2017, was scheduled for renewal in 2023. An assessor visited both the Archive and the Library and Heritage Centre, after which we received a glowing report. They described us as “an effective institutional archive which is a significant asset to the Royal College of Nursing”.

In April, international speakers attended a spectacular launch event for the RCN Foundation-funded project *Sharing Nurses' Life Stories*. Over two years, the archive team catalogued and digitised the archive collections of nurses who worked internationally and shared them online thanks to a grant award from the RCN Foundation.

A collaborative research project led by University of Sussex with RCN nurse researchers from across the RCN, *Impact of COVID on Nurses (ICON)*, ran throughout the pandemic. Interviews were conducted with nurses working on the frontlines, assessing the personal and professional impact of COVID-19 on nurses. The archive team carried out project work from February to December 2023, taking in interviews, seeking permissions and transcribing interviews for the RCN permanent collections. The collection will be closed for a substantial period but will eventually provide a unique research resource.

“ I always receive an excellent service from the library staff. There can be no improvement on excellence!”

RCN Library and Archive user



## Country libraries

### RCN Wales Library and Information Service

In 2023, RCN HQ Library Customer Service helped us to stock take and weed our book stock. The library's physical space was decluttered, creating a more welcoming and accessible environment for our members.

The library's commitment to engaging with members and staff was demonstrated in a 12-month rolling marketing and promotion plan. The increase in literature search requests, particularly in the last three months of the year, highlighted growing dependence on the library for specialist nursing research support. The celebration of Black History Month with a

curated book display and the initiation of the Library in a Box pilot project for the independent sector underscored the library's dedication to diversity, inclusivity and expanded reach.

“ Updated, relevant and professional information is always available”

*RCN Wales library user*

### Northern Ireland Library and Information Zone

2023 focused on enhancing the service visibility and maximising reach across the RCN Northern Ireland (NI) members. We attended student recruitment sessions and Employment Relations Department hospital walkabouts and events. We provided one-to-one library training sessions, re-introduced timetabled Open University student training, and supported nursing support workers in the independent sector with a visit to a local care home. In September, our librarian gave a presentation at the RCN NI Network Leads and Links Workshop.

We introduced member social events to the library calendar, including: a Student Open Day, a World Book Night book giveaway, Halloween

pumpkin carving, a Self-Care Week event with pamper and healthy eating products, and several hamper competitions. We sponsored the October book for the South Eastern Branch book club and helped judge their naming competition. We again partnered with the Belfast Homelessness Charity, donating 35 filled Christmas shoeboxes, and organised a successful food bank appeal for the Downpatrick area, following devastating floods there in October.

Our librarian contributed to RCN NI team projects, supporting development of a new Ambassador role, producing webforms and packs for the project and helping to develop a project strategy. As staff link for the RCN NI History of Nursing Network, she co-designed a pull-up stand for the launch of their book *Nurses' Voices from the Second World War: The Ireland Connection* in December and assisted with event planning. She helped review the application process for the Marcia Mackie and Rae Bequest education grants.

In July RCN HQ Library Customer Service helped us to stock take and weed our book stock. We initiated a wellbeing book collection and completed a minor refurbishment of the library space.

“ Really appreciate your fabulous services at the RCN library, students at Queens are always raving in class about the great support you offer”

*RCN Northern Ireland Information Zone user*



## RCN Scotland Learning Hub

As well as welcoming members into the library, we provided services across Scotland. We updated the physical book collection, adding more titles to support exhibition themes. Demand for literature searches continued to increase, with excellent feedback received from members.

Our outreach activities brought library services to events and ensured reach across the geographical spread of members. Highlights included workplace events, the RCN Advanced Nurse Practitioner Conference, Band 4 college student engagement, Nursing Support Workers' Day, student recruitment stands and presentations, and employability fairs for final-year students.

We delivered library promotion and training with nursing support workers as part of RCN Scotland We Care sessions to encourage membership and promote the benefits of evidence-based practice. We created a promotional video for nursing students.

We installed 2 exhibitions, celebrating learning disability nursing through *A History of Care or Control? Over 100 Years of Learning Disability Nursing* and exploring the experiences of nursing staff during past pandemics and

COVID-19 in *Unmasked: Real Stories of Nursing in COVID-19*. Four successful hybrid events reached over 200 people in person and online. We hosted a library information stand at the RCN Scotland Reps Conference and facilitated the conference networking session for learning reps. We provided quarterly networking and information meetings for learning reps, plus a hybrid development day covering topics including creating branch study days, influencing policy work, and safe staffing legislation. We supported and grew our network of RCN student ambassadors, supported members of the RCN UK Students Committee and Learning Representatives Committee and engaged with nursing student members via the RCN Scotland Students Facebook Group.

We worked collaboratively with RCN Scotland teams, providing literature search support for Employment Relations, supporting the Policy team with evidence for influencing Scottish government health and social care policy, conducting evidence search summaries to help influence the Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce, and supporting NHS pay and industrial action activity.

“ I was finding difficulty with refining my literature search results for a research assignment. The librarian was able to provide excellent guidance and tips to figure out a better strategy to find exactly what was needed. This has saved me hours of work and has been invaluable. I recommend accessing the library service to all of my colleagues”

*RCN Scotland member feedback*

“

Very prompt response  
from the library and helpful  
advice on my specific search”

RCN Library and Archive user



## Project in focus – virtual reading room

Following extensive research, we established a virtual reading room using technology to livestream access to our historic print collection this year. This technology enables researchers to access our unique collection without needing to come to the physical library. Our aim is to remove barriers to accessing the collection without resorting to digitisation and to provide equity of access to our collections to all members, regardless of location or disability.

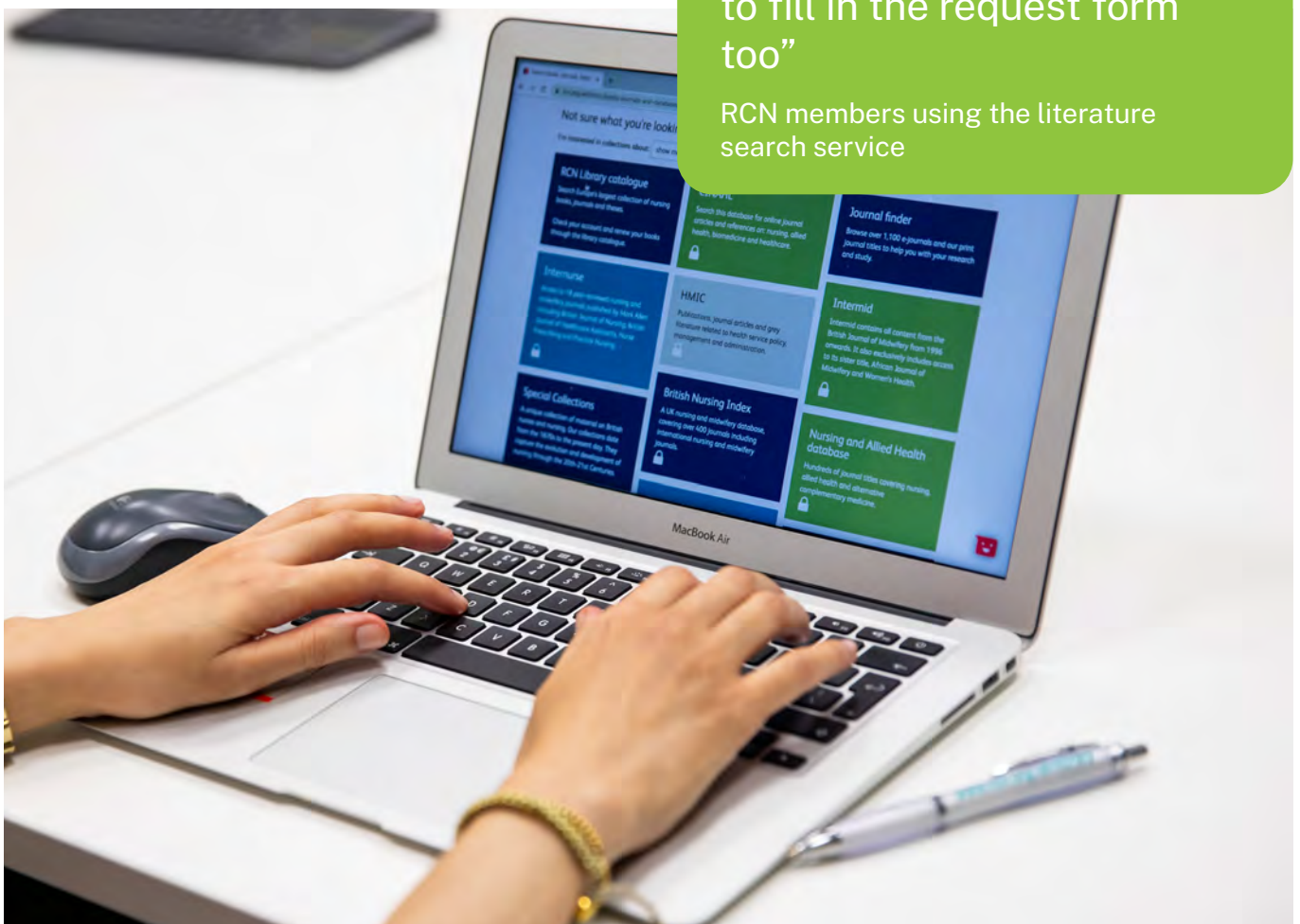
This technology allows for the live streaming of printed material in a Microsoft Teams meeting. A researcher can make an appointment with the library to view any of the items in the collection. A member of the library team will set up the equipment and, at the request of the researcher, stream access to the item, turning pages as required and allowing the researcher to read the item live. Sessions are for 1 hour and

are booked in advanced. There is no restriction on the number of items that can be produced for the session: the only limit is time.

Our first session enabled 2 members of the Northern Ireland History of Nursing Network to research the bound Rolls of Honour, enabling them to identify Irish nurses from the Second World War for their new book, *Nurses' Voices from the Second World War: The Ireland Connection*. They were extremely happy with their experience, particularly as they found several names they had not come across before.

“ The search results came quickly and that was really helpful. It was simple to fill in the request form too”

RCN members using the literature search service



## Industrial action

As the College embarked on its historic industrial action, the Library and Archive Service sprang into action, embracing the chance to be fully involved in the College's work. Before the ballot we carried out literature searches to help provide evidence for the action, and we began planning as soon as possible to ensure minimal service disruption to our members.

As the ballot went live the team were there, walking wards and clinical settings to meet members and discuss their concerns, participating in the RCN text campaign to answer member questions and promoting the ballot on our social media. The team visited 34 trusts and sites and spent 235 hours

encouraging members to participate in the historic ballot.

Once members had voted to strike, we joined strike committees, collected resources, and supervised and participated in picket lines. In total we provided over 1,000 hours of strike support. We moved to a skeleton service in the space to ensure we were able to maintain member services, including answering enquiries, fulfilling our teaching requirements, and offering literature search services. The archive has been archiving the records of the strike to ensure we maintain the corporate memories as well as the personal stories of this important time.



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**The RCN represents nurses and nursing,  
promotes excellence in practice and  
shapes health policies**

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