Welcome to the Royal College of Nursing of the United Kingdom

Our policy and international work

Royal College of Nursing
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by Chief Executive & General Secretary
Janet Davies and President Cecilia Anim

We are very pleased to introduce you to the world’s largest professional body and trade union for nursing staff and to offer further information on our policy and international work.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has more than 425,000 members and represents nurses and nursing in the UK and across the globe, working in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Founded in 1916, we have been working for 100 years to improve nursing education, develop and share good practice and promote nursing as a profession.

The RCN works to influence and shape health policies internationally, in the European Union, Westminster and the devolved UK governments. Through national and international campaigns, parliamentary lobbying in the UK and Brussels and consultations on new legislation, the RCN is the voice of nursing.

The RCN also promotes excellence in practice for all nursing professionals through our clinical research and specialist forums. This focus on good practice and professionalism benefits nursing staff and improves patient care.

We are very proud to lead the RCN; an organisation that exists to represent nurses and nursing, support its members, improve patient care and influence health policies in the UK and internationally.

We hope you find this brochure useful and informative.
Since the early 20th century the RCN has been a significant voice across the UK; pioneering nursing’s transformation from an ‘extension of feminine instincts’ to a respected profession.

When Sarah Swift, the Matron-in-Chief of the British Red Cross, and MP Arthur Stanley invited hospital matrons to a meeting in Pall Mall, London, in February 1916, the idea of a College of Nursing took hold. By March of that year the College of Nursing Ltd had been incorporated and placed under the direction of a College council.

Its aim was to advance nursing as a profession. At the time this meant introducing a register of qualified nurses; standardising education curricula and qualifications; emphasising continuous development; and positioning nursing as a serious career rather than a stop gap for young unmarried women with ‘angelic’ vocational callings. In short, the College was laying the foundations of what we recognise as nursing today.

In 1928 the College was granted a Royal Charter which defined its purpose through a series of objectives. These objectives inform the mission and strategic goals of the modern RCN and the charter determines how it is governed – with changes to the charter having to be agreed by the membership and the Privy Council.

The RCN mission statement
The Royal College of Nursing represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

Today the College supports the professional development of its diverse membership; lobbying governments to develop health care practice and improve patient care.

The College is a trade union, providing nursing with a voice locally, nationally and internationally and ensuring the nursing team is valued and protected in the workplace.
The RCN Foundation

The RCN Foundation is an independent registered charity, which was formed in April 2010 when the RCN changed its legal structure. The charity supports nursing to improve the health and wellbeing of the public through grants to improve nursing practice and patient care, and awards for learning, research and development. The Foundation also provides support to members of the nursing team in need through a Benevolent Fund. You can find out more about the work of the RCN Foundation and how you can support it at www.rcnfoundation.org.uk

RCN milestones

1916
College of Nursing Ltd established

1928
Granted a Royal Charter

1960
Membership opened to all registered nurses, including men

1968
Membership opened to student nurses

1977
Registered as a trade union

2001
Membership opened to health care assistants

2016
Celebrating the RCN’s centenary
About our organisation
How we are governed and managed

The RCN is a member-led organisation. Our members shape the direction and policies of the College through consultation and debate. They also elect the 31 representatives of RCN Council, who are the voice of the countries and regions in the decision-making process.

The RCN Congress meets annually and is the delegate body of the organisation. It is empowered to request the Council to take action on any matter within the RCN’s objectives. Council can either take the action or report back the reasons for not taking action. Congress is an opportunity for members to influence the RCN’s policy agenda, along with a whole range of mechanisms to engage and hear members’ voices on important policy issues ranging from using social media platforms like Twitter twitter.com/thercn and Facebook www.facebook.com/royalcollegeofnursing to events, forums and meetings.

The annual general meeting (AGM) is the main opportunity for members to ask Council Members questions about decisions they have made. Members are supported by the College’s staff who advise on and implement Council’s decisions.

RCN objectives
The Royal College of Nursing was established to develop nursing as a profession and be a voice for nursing through:

- promoting the science and art of nursing and the better education of nurses and their efficiency in the profession of nursing
- promoting the advancement of nursing as a profession in any or all of its branches
- promoting, through the medium of international agencies and otherwise, the purposes in other countries as well as in the United Kingdom
- assisting nurses who by reason of adversity, ill health or otherwise are in need of assistance of any nature.
Our international work informs our domestic policy development, and we learn from overseas. We debate what we do domestically on the international stage while also helping and supporting our sister nursing associations and alliances internationally.

The RCN works with a range of European and international alliances, such as the International Council of Nurses; the European Federation of Nurses’ Associations and the European Federation of Public Service Unions; the European Commission; and members of the European Parliament, to shape European Union and international agreements on issues that impact on nursing and health care. These include needlestick injuries, patient safety and infection control, the EU health workforce action plan, patients’ access to cross border care, and mutual recognition of nursing qualifications.

The RCN’s overall commitment to promote the development of nursing internationally is enshrined in its Royal Charter and was reaffirmed in 2010 through RCN Council’s agreement of a clear international purpose and guiding principles. This has led to a greater focus on influencing EU policies, involvement in international development work, and the use of international evidence and best practice to influence UK policy and practice.

Through its alliances the RCN is part of a network of nursing and midwifery associations across the world that exchange good practice and campaign jointly to address global issues. These include maternal mortality, gender equality, social determinants of health, skill mix across the EU and health worker shortages. The RCN also has been working with its international partners and non-governmental organisations to advocate for the protection of the human rights of nurses and their patients.

The RCN promotes volunteering in partnership with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). The RCN also works closely with the international departments of other Royal Colleges. The College works with a number of non-governmental organisations – such as the Tropical Health Education Trust (THET) – to raise the role of nurses in improving health in developing world countries. With guidance from its International Committee, the RCN also develops new partnership projects with sister nursing associations and is engaged in international development work through a pilot partnership project in Zambia. These projects further support the RCN’s dedication to the achievement of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.
RCN Policy and international briefings

Recent consultation responses:
- the RCN response to the review of EU mutual recognitions of professional qualifications
- the RCN response to the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) development framework
- the RCN responses to major health and social care reforms in England
- the RCN response to the NHS care objectives: a draft mandate to the NHS Commissioning Board
- the RCN response to the World Health Organization’s consultation on strengthening nursing and midwifery
- the RCN response to the Government’s review of Tier 2 immigration and system reform
- the RCN response to the Global Health Workforce Alliance’s workforce strategy (2015-2030).

Recent factsheets include:
- RCN factsheet on nurse prescribing
- RCN factsheet on specialist nursing
- RCN factsheet on CPD.

For further policy briefings and responses to consultations visit: www.rcn.org.uk/policy

For nursing in the UK and abroad visit: www.rcn.org.uk/nursing

For events and conferences visit: www.rcn.org.uk/events

For professional development visit: www.rcn.org.uk/development

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