RCN Council meeting 6 and 7 March 2013
Summary report for RCN members

This report is a summary of the key points discussed and agreed at the confidential and open sessions of the RCN Council meeting on the 6 and 7 March 2013.

Francis report
We held a special session, outside of our formal meeting, specifically to discuss how we move forward following Robert Francis’ report of the Inquiry into Care provided by Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust. We were pleased to be joined at the session by the chairs of our UK representative committees, chair of the Ethics Committee, and a representative from the RCN Fellows.

We noted that many of you have already discussed the report at board and branch meetings and the feedback we have received so far helped us to focus our discussions on the following key themes:

- Regulation of HCSWs
- Staffing levels
- Leadership
- Whistleblowing and culture
- Nursing policy and position
- Health policy
- Role of the RCN

The output from our discussions will now help to frame our future work arising from the report and our feedback to the imminent Government response to Lord Francis’ report.

Congress review
We also held a workshop to begin our discussions on the Congress constitution and rules which are being updated. This follows a joint meeting of the Agenda Committee and Governance Support committees and sessions run at each of their subsequent meetings. The next stage will be a consultation through the boards and branches.

Finance, audit and corporate services.
Andy McGovern, Chair of the Business Committee and Honorary Treasurer chaired this session.

Audit Committee: We noted a report from the Audit Committee which had considered a number of external and internal audits and the recommendations to be taken forward from them. We were pleased to note the substantial assurance given to our core financial systems. We also received the committee’s annual report which summarised its activity over the financial year. Council acknowledged the sound progress by the organisation over the last few years in this area.
Business Committee: We also noted a report from the Business Committee which has been focussing on the future strategy, annual operational plan and the budget – all of which we considered in more detail later on in the agenda. We also agreed a short term investment plan for our cash balances pending the development of medium and long-term strategy through our new Investment Sub-Committee.

The committee reported that the HQ re-plan project is still on track and on budget, and that work was being undertaken to review the RCN staff pension scheme.

Annual operational plan 2013-2014 and budget: we approved the annual operational plan for our forthcoming year. The plan summarises our key activities for the year and ensures we are in line with our longer term strategy and goals. Our energies will be concentrated on driving up the quality of care and working tirelessly to safeguard our members’ jobs, pay, terms and conditions but the plan also acknowledges the difficult financial conditions we are operating in.

We also approved the budget for the RCN for the coming 21 months as we transition our financial year to January-December. We face some major cost pressures during this period – most significantly legal representation and indemnity and have had to identify significant savings to provide for these.

We will also be starting to consult members through boards and branches about what subscription rates should be from January 2014 and beyond.

Risk management, KPIs and management accounts: We receive a report on corporate risks at each meeting and discussed the risk matrix for the period since November 2012. We also noted progress against our agreed key performance indicators and discussed our financial performance against budget at the end of January.

Strategy 2013-2018: we agreed the content of our next five-year strategy. We have been consulting with members and other stakeholders over the last year and found that feedback has focussed on five core themes:

- promoting excellence in practice
- nursing education and development
- shaping health policies
- representing nurses and nursing, and supporting members in the workplace
- an effective, value for money organisation

The strategy will now be published at Congress 2013 and will be used to inform our future direction.

EGM – International Council of Nurses
We approved the wording of the resolution that will be put to members at the extraordinary general meeting that we called back in January following discussions on our membership of the International Council of Nurses (ICN).
The meeting will take place during Congress week on April 23rd in Liverpool.

The agreed wording is:

*To authorise RCN Council to withdraw the RCN from membership of the International Council of Nurses.*

We have been having discussions since 2007 on the level of fees we pay to the International Council of Nurses (ICN), a federation of 130 membership organisations. Along with other member associations, we have also been pressing for ICN to become more fit for purpose to meet the global health challenges facing nursing now and in the future.

Fees have been rising significantly because of exchange rate fluctuations and because ICN calculates fees on the number of nurse members in the representative organisation of each country. This means our fees represent 16% of the overall ICN subscription income, i.e. over half a million pounds annually. We believe this is unsustainable and inequitable.

If members authorise Council to withdraw the RCN from membership of the ICN, the RCN would still be fully committed to working with international partners on issues of common interest to nursing at home and abroad.

More information about this will be posted on the RCN website very shortly at www.rcn.org.uk/egm.

**Expenses policy**

We discussed proposals arising from a review of the members and staff expenses policies. It is good practice to review such policies on a regular basis to ensure they remain fit for purpose and compliant with HMRC guidelines.

We re-affirmed the principles underpinning the policies and also agreed some minor changes to the members’ expenses policy which clarify terminology and expense claims by accredited reps. The revised policy will be on the RCN website shortly.

**Retired membership payment plans**

We also agreed changes to the definitions for the retired nurse and health practitioner member payment plans to iron out a number of consistencies. We agreed that in future those eligible for these categories of membership will be defined as follows:

*Nurses or health practitioners who are retired from all employment or who are unable to work through ill health and who are in receipt of relevant ill health benefit.*
 Governance issues
We heard a report from the Governance Support Committee and approved a process for filling casual vacancies on Council, committees and boards which the committee had developed following the AGM in 2012.

We also received an update on the Legal and Governance Review of Boards and heard that the review is now in its implementation stage. We approved a descriptor for the role of board chair as well as guidance on confidentiality at board meetings. We also approved guidance for the development and implementation of local networks of members.

We noted that elections are due for the Agenda Committee and for Council later this year and we approved the processes and timelines for them. Information about the elections will be published very shortly on the website and in RCN Bulletin.

RCN Foundation
Ian Norris, one of our four Council members on the Foundation board of trustees, reported back from its recent meetings. Ian also introduced us to Dinah Cox whom we were pleased to welcome as the new Head of the Foundation.

Bursary winners will be again joining us at Congress to receive their awards.

We noted that the demand for Benevolent Fund support is growing which reflects the very difficult financial climate today. The Foundation and the RCN are planning a new joint referral and assessment centre to provide a single point of contact for all nursing staff who require help.

Reports from our committees
We heard reports from each of the committees which report directly into Council.

Nursing Policy and Practice Committee (NPPC): the committee had met twice since its last report to Council. The February meeting was the day after the Francis Report was published and members spent the morning discussing a high level summary of the findings of the report and its recommendations.

In December the committee had met forum chairs to discuss how the committee and the forums could work more effectively together in future. A similar meeting with the Ethics Committee will take place in May. Joint work is also taking place with the International Committee and the Research and Development Governance Group. The committee is also working on how it consults with boards on practice and policy issues under the new governance arrangements.

The committee noted that a new professional standards body would be set up in April to oversee the standards for the structure and content of health and
social care records and that it was likely that the RCN would be invited to chair or administer this new body.

The committee was briefed on the recent media coverage of the Liverpool Care Pathway and the Government decision to set an independent inquiry led by Baroness Neuberger.

The committee agreed in principle a draft of a publication on defining staffing levels for children and young people but asked that it be reviewed in light of the Francis Report for any potential impact before it was signed off for publication.

Finally, the committee noted that RCN Scotland had responded to the Children and Young People Bill Scotland and was actively lobbying for a statutory entitlement to health visiting services for the under fives to be included in the Bill.

**Membership and Representation Committee (MRC):** the committee has met twice since its last report to Council.

Its February meeting was on the day the Francis Report was published and the immediate focus was to ensure that accredited representatives received a clear briefing sheet and had all the support they needed.

The committee was updated on the proposed changes to Agenda for Change; the impact of the transition process related to NHS reforms in England and the latest position on the NHS Pension Scheme.

The committee also agreed to consult members on the NHS Working Longer Review through a joint union survey and a board questionnaire regarding the NHS Working Longer Review.

The findings of a project to examine the facility arrangements in place for RCN reps were considered by the committee and members asked for a model facilities agreement to be produced for reps to use in the field.

The committee had also referred a number of issues to the Trade Union Governance Group for them to discuss with the UK Committees.

**Ethics Committee:** the committee had met twice since the previous meeting of Council.

The committee agreed its work programme for the coming 12 months around three key work-streams, and also welcomed the opportunity to take part in the Council discussion on the Francis Report. The committee affirmed its commitment to play in developing the position re the role of the RCN as a college and trade union and how to reconcile the tensions between standards and self interest. The committee will also contribute to the development of practical guidance for whistle-blowers.
The committee agreed the revised RCN position statement on termination of pregnancy. The committee is also developing its ways of working and its links with other RCN committees and work-streams.

**Diversity Committee:** The committee had met in February and discussed a paper by the South West board on diversity and equality in the workplace. The paper provides an overview of the nine protected characteristics and encourages members to promote diversity and equality in the workplace. We agreed to make the paper available across the RCN.

The committee considered a paper on equality and employment trends in London and were taken aback by some of the statistics. We also discussed hate crime and some worrying trends which show a decline in the number of BME nurse directors and nurse leaders.

During the discussion we stressed the importance of being able to support overseas nurses who come to work in the UK and to ensure that they are not exploited.

We were also pleased to hear that work on the *Fair care for trans* guidance is being finalised.

**International Committee:** the committee has spent much of its time focussing on the issues surrounding the RCN’s membership of the International Council of Nurses (ICN).

The committee is also concerned that the Commonwealth Secretariat draft strategic plan for 2013-2016 does not identify health and education as priority areas. Members had also discussed the proposed revisions to the draft professional qualifications directive and on EU wide education competencies.

The committee discussed the RCN draft position statement on the revision of EU medical devices regulations and agreed to recommend that the Nursing Practice and Policy Committee approve the position statement to be used as an overarching document to inform the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency consultation on the UK position on the Directive.

The committee had also considered a needs assessment which is to inform the development of a draft international development partnership and pilot project plan with the Zambia Union of Nurses Organisation (ZUNO).

**Student Committee:** the Student Committee had met in January and focussed on its three priority work-streams for the coming year.

The committee will focus on pay and terms and conditions for newly registered nurses, representation, safeguarding and issues around whistleblowing as well as recruitment to the RCN and the services to students through the RCN Foundation.
The committee will also be looking at the implications of the Willis Commission especially on mentorship and preceptorship; the implications of the Francis report, and will be working with the Long Term Conditions Forum on work around the Liverpool Pathway Review.

The committee will also focus on its ways of working following the changes that have taken place as part of the Legal and Governance review and the desire to increase the amount of “virtual” working.

Health Practitioner Committee: this was the first time the committee had reported formally to Council on behalf of the RCN’s HCA members – a historic moment for us all.

We were pleased to hear that the Committee is building itself up and continues to promote itself and its work.

The priorities for the committee over the coming year will be the regulation, education and training for health care support workers and also recruitment and retention of HCA members within the RCN.

The committee will also focus on patient safety with the aim of raising awareness for HCAs and APs of the patient safety agenda including recognition of the role of HCAs and APs in patient safety.

Members of the committee have also been involved in making a short film about RCN membership and its benefits.

Updates from the President, Deputy President and Chair of Council

The President, Deputy President and Chair of Council reported on their activities since the last Council meeting.

The President and Deputy President highlighted a number of visits where they had met members in their workplaces.

Andrea Spyropoulos, President, had also taken part in judging for the Nursing Standard Nurse of the Year awards and Deputy President Cecilia Anim had attended a reception at the House of Lords held by Brooks and the Family Planning Association.

Kath McCourt, Chair of Council, had undertaken a number of internal RCN meetings including taking part in the appraisals of senior RCN staff.