

Becoming an RCN representative




Take the RCN representative profile quiz!

Please read each question and tick the boxes that apply **STRONGLY** to you.

Do you...

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| have an interest in good employment practice? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| get involved in charity work and fundraising outside work? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| want to do something about workplace stress? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| have an interest in employment rights and case law? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| enjoy creative activities? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| believe that a safer workplace equals better patient safety? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| understand that patient care is inextricably linked to the welfare of employees? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| feel that being persuasive is one of your strengths? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| enjoy numbers, measurement and data? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| stand up on behalf of your family and friends? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| like to promote the value of learning for life? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| take an interest in environmental and 'green' issues? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| enjoy crisis intervention at work? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| believe that access to learning is a fundamental right? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| like organising people and events? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| have an interest in your employment contract, terms & conditions and entitlements? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| enjoy attending evening classes? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| believe happy workplaces make safer workplaces? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

How many of each colour did you tick?



MOSTLY GREY:
You would be well suited to the role of an RCN learning representative.



MOSTLY BLUE:
You could do a great job as an RCN safety representative.



MOSTLY RED:
You have the necessary qualities to make an excellent RCN steward.



People look at me now and see someone who has grown. What do I have that I didn't before? It's called a voice. I feel like I have found a purpose again, and that has had a knock-on effect for me personally and also in my clinical role. I feel reinvigorated.

Liz Jeremiah, Steward, RCN South East region

Every day, in workplaces around the UK, RCN representatives (reps) are making a difference. Often they are working behind the scenes, with many members and employers having little idea of the huge contribution they make.

In the summer of 2017, we invited a group of reps from all four corners of the UK to share their experiences and feelings. We gathered their stories, and created *The Value of Reps: In Our Own Words* book.

You can download the publication at:

rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-006238

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Introduction

This guide is designed to give you an understanding of the role and activities of RCN reps.

We've included information and case studies about each of the rep roles to help you consider which may suit and interest you most. You'll find an outline of the process for applying and an application form, along with information about what you can expect as you embark on your role, including learning, development and support.

We welcome expressions of interest from all members of the nursing team, and we aim to provide newly accredited reps with the knowledge, skills and confidence to become active and make a difference in the workplace.

You can also visit our reps' area on the RCN website, where you'll find useful information, including short interviews with some experienced RCN reps.

Visit: rcn.org.uk/rep



I would definitely recommend becoming an RCN rep. It's so supportive and the training that is available is wonderful. The people that you are going to meet will have very similar experiences and it's such a great thing to do, so get involved!

Karen Boot, Steward, RCN East Midlands region

1. What is an RCN rep?

A trade union rep is a member who has been elected to represent union members in the organisation where they are employed.

The RCN has three types of accredited rep:

- learning rep
- safety rep
- steward.

Where the RCN has a recognition agreement with an employer, trade union reps have a statutory right to reasonable, paid time off from employment to carry out union duties.

All NHS and many independent sector employers have recognition agreements with the RCN, but if you do not think your organisation has one, please talk to your local office about how we might work together to negotiate support and time off for the role. For more information about time off see section 11.



Learning reps: Role descriptor

Learning and training must be valued and protected to ensure the nursing workforce can deliver high quality care. Our members should expect to have fair and equal access within a positive learning culture which treats them with dignity and respect.

Learning reps provide space for members to think about their current practice and future aspirations and consider what learning they need to reach their goals. Where members are struggling or discouraged, learning reps help them access support and resources to boost their confidence, and challenge systemic barriers that might be getting in their way.

Learning reps build strong relationships in their workplace and understand how to influence for change. They connect with members to find out what matters to them and support them to get their issues heard and win changes that make a difference.

Learning reps grow the membership and encourage people to be active because they know that power and real change require a strong voice at a local and national level.

Supporting and representing RCN members

- Support members and colleagues by providing information and advice about learning and training
- Analyse learning and training needs

Improving the working lives of RCN members

- Work with members and union colleagues to arrange union learning and training events
- Consult/collaborate with the employer to improve learning and training

Creating and building workplace relationships

- Build workplace relationships and networks
- Attend and contribute to workplace committees/groups

Being a representative of the RCN

- Raise your profile and the profile of the RCN
- Recruit members and reps
- Promote RCN campaigns
- Access and work within RCN support structures

All activity is carried out with support of, and in partnership with, the local RCN officers, the UK Representative Committee lead and community of RCN reps.

Safety reps: Role descriptor

The health and wellbeing of the nursing workforce is fundamental to the quality of care they can provide. Our members have the right to a safe, healthy and empowering workplace culture where they are treated fairly with dignity and respect.

RCN safety reps understand and champion safe working practice and environments. They help members to understand what they should expect and how to identify where standards fall short, leaving them at risk.

Safety reps build strong relationships in their workplace and understand how to influence for change. They connect with members to find out what matters to them and support them to get their issues heard and win changes that make a difference.

Safety reps grow the membership and encourage people to be active because they know that power and real change require a strong voice at a local and national level.

Supporting and representing RCN members

- Represent members with matters of health and safety
- Carry out workplace inspections

Improving the working lives of RCN members

- Investigate potential hazards, incidents or complaints
- Make representation to the employer on health and safety matters

Creating and building workplace relationships

- Build workplace relationships and networks
- Attend and contribute to workplace committees/groups

Being a representative of the RCN

- Raise your profile and the profile of the RCN
- Recruit members and reps
- Promote RCN campaigns
- Access and work within RCN support structures

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Stewards: Role descriptor

The skills, knowledge, competence, and responsibilities of the nursing workforce must be recognised and valued through fair pay and terms and conditions. Our members should expect to be treated fairly within a culture of respect and dignity.

When members are facing difficult employment issues, stewards will ensure that they feel empowered to speak up and engage in formal processes. With good representation, members can be confident that they will get the fair hearing they deserve.

RCN stewards build strong relationships in their workplace and understand how to influence for change. They connect with members to find out what matters to them and support them to get their issues heard and win changes that make a difference.

Stewards keep growing the membership and getting people active because they know that power and real change require a strong voice at a local and national level.

Supporting and representing RCN members

- Represent individual members through formal processes
- Represent members collectively on matters relating to pay and terms and conditions

Improving the working lives of RCN members

- Work in partnership with the employer and other union colleagues
- Support members to influence for change in the workplace

Creating and building workplace relationships

- Build workplace relationships and networks
- Attend and contribute to workplace committees/groups

Being a representative of the RCN

- Raise your profile and the profile of the RCN
- Recruit members and reps
- Promote RCN campaigns
- Access and work within RCN support structures

All activity is carried out with support of, and in partnership with, the local RCN officers, the UK Representative Committee lead and community of RCN reps.

2. Do I need any experience or formal qualifications to become a rep?

You don't need any qualifications to become an RCN rep. The RCN welcomes reps from across the membership.

You do not need to be a registered nurse or an expert in human resources, education or health and safety to become a rep.

All you will need is energy, enthusiasm and the desire to make a difference in the workplace. We will ensure that you have the right learning, development and support to help you grow into your role.

As a rep you will need to read formal documentation, write statements and letters and use a computer.

However, if you lack confidence in any of those areas, let us know and we can guide you to resources and help you brush up your skills before you start your learning. Please see section 10 if you feel you may need any reasonable adjustments or support.

It is often assumed that you need to be an outgoing, extroverted person to take on a rep role, but we know that people perform best when they work in their own way.

You might be a great public speaker and decide to be at the front of our campaign work, or you might be a reflective, detail-oriented person who loves to pore over policy.

The more reps we have with varied talents, the better we represent our diverse membership in the workplace.

3. How does being a rep impact on or enhance my career development?

It is a common myth that employers and unions are always at loggerheads. In fact, most employers recognise the value of having reps in their workplace and seek to work in partnership to improve workplace culture.

As you get active as an RCN rep, you'll learn new skills and gain confidence in areas you might not have had access to in your nursing role. Many RCN reps say that their role has broadened their career horizons, as well as supported their professional practice.

The learning and development which the RCN provides is second to none, and it will really help you to reflect on your knowledge and skills, and improve your confidence, whatever your role.

RCN rep activity and revalidation

The Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) recognises that not all nursing roles involve direct patient or clinical care. You will find that many of the activities and learning opportunities you undertake as an RCN rep support one or more of the four areas of the NMC code.



4. How do I apply to become a rep?

To register your interest in becoming a rep, complete the form at the back of this booklet and return it to your local RCN office. You can also complete the form at: rcn.org.uk/get-involved/rcn-reps/register-your-interest-in-becoming-an-rcn-rep. This starts the application process.

Someone will then contact you to arrange an informal chat to discuss the role. This will give you an opportunity to talk through any questions you might have after reading this leaflet. It also gives us an opportunity to talk about the level of support you feel you have from your employer and line manager in terms of taking on the role.

If you confirm that you would like to go ahead and become a rep, we will then contact your local branch committee. The branch committee will be asked to ratify (or approve) your application, and you will then be accredited as an RCN rep. The term 'branch' refers to all the union members within a geographical area. Each branch elects a committee, which manages the affairs of the branch. It is vital that reps work with, and have the support of, their branch. This process helps to start forging those links.

Once accredited, we will write to you to let you know. You will be enrolled on the 'pathway' and we'll send you everything you need to get started.

Where you have a recognition agreement, your local RCN office will also write to your employer to confirm that you are an accredited RCN rep and are therefore entitled to paid time off to do your training and undertake your rep role. If you do not have a recognition agreement, but you and your regional office have negotiated support and time off for the role, then this process might be slightly different.

5. Undertaking the learning and development pathway for RCN reps

The learning and development pathway describes a framework of activities you will undertake in practice and the learning needed to perform them. The pathway element refers to the route you take as you access learning that is relevant to you, your role and your area.

We've described the stepping stones to becoming confident and active in your role, and have tried to keep our framework straightforward.

PART 1

Being an RCN rep and building relationships

Online learning



Group learning



Assessment

Part 1 begins with some self-directed online learning where you will explore what it means to be part of a trade union and to be a representative of the RCN. This is followed by a group learning session where you will come together with your rep colleagues to consider how trade union activity and nursing work together.

PART 2

Supporting and representing

Online learning



Group learning



Assessment

Part 2 takes you back online to learn about how you can support and represent members in your specific role and context. You only need to complete the online course that relates to your specific rep role. In the group learning that follows, you will meet other reps who are undertaking the same role as you to consider how you will apply your learning to support members on an individual and collective basis.

PART 3

Improving working lives

Online learning



Group learning



Assessment

Part 3 starts to look at the bigger picture and how you'll work proactively to influence for change, and also manage change in the workplace. You only need to complete the course that relates to your specific rep role. Your final group learning will be an opportunity to work with colleagues from all three rep roles. Together you will look at how you can work in partnership to ask the right questions, listen, and act in the best interests of our members.

6. How long does the learning take?

The pathway for RCN reps is a blended learning experience that comprises both online self-directed learning, and three group learning events (that can take place either in person or online).

6 MONTHS

The average time a rep takes to complete the pathway (but some have been known to zip through quicker).

60 HOURS

The pathway has 60 hours of learning which you can roughly break down into eight days (depending on shift patterns).

When you are accredited, you will be enrolled on the pathway and can go online straightaway and start to plan your learning, which will include requesting time off work to undertake your online learning and attend group learning events.

There is a lot of flexibility in how you plan your learning, but we suggest you get started and book on to your first group learning event as soon as you can.



7. Will I need to travel far or stay away from home?

We offer both online and in-person group learning events and you are free to choose which one you would prefer.

If you do choose to attend an in-person event, the RCN will cover the cost of travel and accommodation in accordance with the members' expenses policy. Lunch will be provided, and an evening meal and breakfast will be included if you are required to stay overnight in a hotel.

8. How much time off do I need and how do I get released from work?

You will need a maximum of 60 hours release from work. This roughly breaks down into eight days, but will depend on how your shifts are allocated and how you plan to undertake your learning.

Negotiating time off is your first activity as a rep, but you have plenty of support to enable you to do that.

Where there is a recognition agreement, a trade union rep is entitled to time off to perform their trade union duties and attend appropriate training. This will be outlined in a local recognition/facilities agreement, or equivalent in your organisation.

When you are accredited, we will write to your HR director informing them of your new role and your right to time off. Then, when you are enrolled onto the pathway, we will provide information to give to your manager that explains not only your right to time off, but the value of having a proactive RCN rep in the workplace.

It is important that you build a good relationship with your manager, and so we always emphasise the benefits of having an RCN rep in the workplace. You will have spoken to someone from your RCN office or patch as part of your application process, and they will be able to support you should you encounter any problems getting time off to attend.

If you do not have a recognition agreement, but have negotiated support for the role and time off from your employer, the process may look slightly different.

9. What is the learning like?

During the pathway, you will learn in small groups in a very practical way. It's not formal or anything like school or college. We encourage a safe and supportive learning environment to ensure you feel comfortable enough to have a go at the activities you will be undertaking as a rep.

We believe that our newly accredited reps bring a huge amount of life experience to the role. We have a wide range of learning activities that give you the opportunity to not only gain new knowledge and skills, but also build on those you already have.

As you go through the pathway, we'll provide you with the opportunity to have a go at the activities you will be expected to undertake, so that you can build your confidence before you get out into the workplace.

As you progress through your pathway, we'll make sure you have time and space to share your successes and challenges, so that you can learn from your fellow reps and start to build up a network of support for the future.

There is an assessment element for each part of the pathway, but we have kept this as simple, relevant, and as easy to undertake as possible.

We have created a template for each assessment, which is a series of questions that check back your learning from the online and group sessions.

10. What kind of support can I expect?

Each RCN country and region has a dedicated learning and development facilitator who is responsible for supporting reps through each module.

They will also work with your region and country to provide continuing learning and development opportunities.

You will be supported by a named member of staff from your local RCN office. They will help you to turn your learning into practice and to get active in your workplace. They are usually an RCN officer, or senior officer, but could also be someone from the RCN region or country with a specific responsibility for reps' learning and development. RCN stewards will receive appropriate supervision for the casework they undertake.

We cover all expenses associated with your learning and development, in accordance with the RCN members' expenses policy, in a timely manner.

A full Statement of Expectations outlines the commitment the RCN will expect of you as a rep, and the support offered to RCN reps. You will find this at: rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications

As you strive to make a difference in your role as a rep, there'll inevitably be times when you'll feel tested. But we'll be with you every step of the way, offering the support and development you need to overcome challenges and make a real and lasting impact in the workplace.



11. Requesting reasonable adjustments

We strive to make the pathway as inclusive as possible and you can contact your learning and development facilitator to talk about anything you might need to make your learning more enjoyable, positive and suited to the way you learn.

If you need to make a reasonable adjustment to the learning process, we'll try to accommodate your needs as best as we can. We'll also talk to your officer/supervisor about whether you might need similar support in the workplace.

There might be rare occasions when we cannot accommodate your adjustment. This might be because we do not have the technology, equipment or expertise to support your needs, but it may also be because an activity is an essential component of the rep role you have chosen and cannot be excluded. In such a case, we would work with you and your local office/branch to look at alternative roles or ways that you can remain a part of our activist community and support our members in the workplace.





12. Getting active in your workplace

From the time you are accredited as a rep, there are ways you can become active in your workplace.

You can start to get to know your RCN colleagues and members by attending a branch meeting and exploring the RCN website to seek out the latest news, resources and campaigns.

You'll have the opportunity to try out activities during the pathway to build your confidence and then have a go in your workplace.

We will encourage you to share your experience of getting active in the workplace with your rep colleagues. Sharing successes and challenges, and learning from other reps, will become an essential part of your practice as a rep and the pathway will help you to start building those support networks.





Ready to apply?

If you feel inspired and ready to become a rep, you can either apply online using the QR code or fill out the form and send it to your local RCN office.



Becoming a rep



Please indicate which type of representative you would like to be accredited as:

Learning representative

Safety representative

Steward

Title (Mr, Mrs etc.)..... First name.....

Surname.....

RCN membership no.....

Job title.....

Workplace.....

Employer.....

Home address.....

Postcode.....

Preferred contact details:

Telephone no.home/work/mobile*

Email work/personal*

*please delete as appropriate.

As part of the application process for becoming a rep, your preferred contact will be shared with your branch chair and secretary and the other RCN reps in your workplace who may contact you to discuss the role. Once you are accredited as a rep we will agree with you the contact details to be shared with the members you will be supporting.

Correspondence will be sent to your home address.

This form is used to keep RCN representative records up to date and to enable us to notify your HR officer and/or your line manager.

OFFICE USE

Branch.....

Name of Branch Executive officer.....

Date email sent.....

Which of these ethnic groups best describes you? (Please tick one box)

If Other, please specify.

White

English

Northern Irish

Welsh

Irish

Scottish

Gypsy/Traveller

Other

Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups

White and
Black Caribbean

White and
Black African

White and Asian

Other

Asian / Asian British

Indian

Bangladeshi

Chinese

Pakistani

Other

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

African

Caribbean

Other

Other ethnic group

Arab

Other

How/where did you hear about the role of an RCN rep?

RCN email

RCN telephone call

RCN library

RCN noticeboard

RCN website

RCN rep

RCN staff

RCN event

RCN publication

RCN Congress

Employer

Social media

Friend/colleague

Currently a rep/been a rep before

Other

Please tick to confirm the below is correct.

I will not hold office in any other UK nursing organisation or any UK health service union at the same time as holding office in the RCN.

Please return form to:



July 2023 | 010 873