



ASK.
LISTEN.
ACT.

USING THE NURSING
WORKFORCE STANDARDS
TO IMPROVE THE WORKING
LIVES OF MEMBERS

**SAFE STAFFING
SAVES LIVES**

This document has been designed in collaboration with our members to ensure it meets most accessibility standards. However, if this does not fit your requirements, please contact

RCN Legal Disclaimer

This publication contains information, advice and guidance to help members of the RCN. It is intended for use within the UK but readers are advised that practices may vary in each country and outside the UK. The information in this booklet has been compiled from professional sources, but its accuracy is not guaranteed. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the RCN provides accurate and expert information and guidance, it is impossible to predict all the circumstances in which it may be used.

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FOREWORD

This second edition of your *Ask. Listen. Act* booklet has been revised following the launch of the RCN's *Nursing Workforce Standards* in May 2021.

A working group of RCN reps and staff came together to review the *Nursing Workforce Standards*. The overwhelming feeling was that they spell out the link between working conditions and patient care in a way that will help people understand trade union activity in a professional context.

They can be used by reps and branches to start a conversation about what you experience in the workplace and to work proactively with members, other trade unions and senior managers to highlight and address system-wide issues.

In this way you can move the conversation from “who went wrong and how can we blame them” to “what went wrong and how we can f x it”.

Working with the *Standards* will help you to consider your workplace through bor mar wnico woâ

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

The guiding principle behind “ask,



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- Are you seeing evidence of a significant breach of the *Nursing Workforce Standards*? If you think that there are signs of a significant breach you will need to alert your RCN regional/country office immediately and use your workplace systems for reporting serious concerns.
- External sources – for those working in the NHS, the NHS Staff Survey provides a key measure of job satisfaction among NHS staff by employer. Regulatory body – or other inspectorate – reports can also provide valuable information about areas of improvement for your workplace that have been identified by external assessors.
- RCN sources – you can access a wealth of resources, evidence and good practice guidance from the RCN Library.

Sources of information

You will find many sources of information that you can draw on as a rep:

- Internal sources – your employer's policies, accident/incident/near miss reports, complaints data, risk registers, protocols etc can provide workplace-specific information to support you in raising and addressing issues. Have members raised any related issues with you about the area you are looking into? Could you get some additional feedback from members to strengthen your question?

The Library team is always on hand to support you, but, for each of the 14 *Nursing Workforce Standards*, we've suggested some key words that might kick start your search.

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Staffing for safe and effective care

For many years, the RCN has been drawing attention to the gap between the current size of the workforce and what is required to meet the health and care needs of the population. In all types of settings, nursing staff describe the impact that shortages and increasing demand have on their abiliqur2 (n)-



- What workforce and workload planning strategies are used in your workplace?
- Where can you find data on feedback from patients and their families?
- Do organisational/service change proposals trigger a review of staffing levels?
- Are student nurses supernumerary?

establishment figures.

- Do planned nursing staffing figures only count staff providing nursing care? Support staff, for example, clerical and catering staff, should not be included.



Think about:

- What are members telling you about staff ng levels in their wards/areas?
- Are there any particular hotspots where staff are reporting feeling unsafe?
- What are the local processes for raising/escalating concerns about staff ng?
- Are staff using local processes to report/record their concerns?
- Is there a shared commitment to learning from patient feedback?
- Are senior managers committed to early engagement and communication with staff on emerging issues?

Act:

- Can you bring colleagues together to find out what they think about staffing in your workplace and what they are prepared to do about it?
- Is there a way for you to access information about feedback or reported concerns about staffing?
- Can you identify an opportunity in a suitable forum, for you and others to raise concerns about staffing?

Search terms:

Nursing establishment, nurse staffing, raising and escalating concerns.

Staffing during change or a crisis

Standard 3:

Ask:

- Are there business continuity plans for dealing with critical incidents or events?
- Do the plans contain appropriate systems to enable continued delivery of services at acceptable, predefined levels during a disruptive incident?
- Do the plans consider impacts on staffing, including redeployment?
- Have plans been developed in consultation with nursing leaders and staff side/recognised trade unions?
- How regularly are plans reviewed and tested?

Think about:

- How might the plans affect patient/client experience?
- Could any staff/RCN members be adversely affected in terms of their employment/terms and conditions/health and safety?

- Could any RCN members face redeployment?
- Are formal processes and timescales being adhered to by management/HR? Is there any aspect of the planning process that you need to challenge?
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Workplace relations

As well as your pay and contract this is also about the ongoing discussions, plans and decisions that affect your ways of working, development and health and safety.

Recognition is when an employer formally recognises a union such as the RCN and provides staff with a collective voice and individual representation if needed.

The NHS has a collective recognition agreement with all healthcare unions and many of the larger independent sector employers have recognition agreements with the RCN.

Facilities agreements cover all aspects of employment relations between trade unions and employers including negotiation and collective bargaining mechanisms and rights, paid time off for reps, and access to rooms and resources.

Partnership forums or workplace committees provide a formal mechanism to support discussion. 8 (d) r64fTd(t)12.7 (h)-2.6 ((t)-9..3 (e) meuresoues po262 0 -11.339 -5.077 -11.33

Partnership working for fair pay, terms and conditions

Standard 4:

Ask:

- How does your organisation consult with staff on key issues? Is there formal recognition and a partnership forum?
- What are the terms of reference for any partnership forum/workplace committees you attend?
- When do meetings take place and

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CLINICAL LEADERSHIP AND SAFETY

As reps, you can help create a culture that ensures there are nurses in leadership roles and, when they are in post, they are given the time and resources to do their role well. We also need to hold our nurse leaders to account and support them to identify issues and concerns and consider actions for improvement.

Clinical team/ service leadership

Standard 5:

Ask:

- Do all services that employ nursing staff have a registered nurse as part of the leadership team?
- Do nursing staff working within a multi-disciplinary team which is not led by a registered nurse have a clear professional line and access to clinical nursing leadership?

Think about:

- Are there any hotspots where reported levels of clinical/serious untoward incidents (SUIs) might suggest issues around clinical leadership?
- Are members able to access nursing leadership for NMC revalidation?
- What are members saying to you about the clinical leadership within their service area?

Act:

- Is there a way for you to access information about recorded incidents so you can share and discuss it with your officer and other trade union rep colleagues?
- Can you meet with clinical leaders in your organisation to raise identified concerns? Could you bring members with you to share their experiences?

Search terms:

Serious untoward incidents, clinical leadership.

Resourcing clinical leadership

Standard 6:

Ask:

- Are registered nurse leads so that they have time to undertake the full range of clinical leadership activities?
- If not, what rationale has been documented, agreed by the board and highlighted to commissioners/regulators?
- Are registered nurse lead roles in the leadership team reflected and incorporated into job descriptions to ensure the additional workload and time management are included?

Think about:

- Do you have a relationship with the registered leads for nursing in your workplace?

Act:

- Can you set up a meeting with registered leads for nursing in your workplace or use an existing opportunity to start a conversation with them about nursing staff levels?

- Are there members who might be prepared to join you for the meeting to share their experiences and concerns?

Search terms:

Clinical leadership, nursing leadership.

Practice and staff development

Standard 7:

Ask:

- What are the organisational completion rates on nursing staff appraisals?
- What is the organisational spend on staff training?

Think about:

- How do nursing staff compare with other clinical colleagues in terms of their access to appraisal, personal development, mandatory training, clinical training and development and proportion of training budget spend?
- Are there any groups of nursing staff who are unfairly treated in terms of their access to development, for example, part-time staff?
- Do staffing challenges impact the ability of nursing staff to access development opportunities?
- Are some nursing staff failing to progress through increment/pay gateways due to a lack of access to development opportunities?
- Is lack of nursing staff development impacting negatively on patient/client safety and/or experience?
- What are members across the organisation saying to you about staff development?

Act

- Is there a way for you to access information about staff learning and development so you can share and discuss it with your officer and other trade union rep colleagues?

- Can you use planned learning events as an opportunity to connect with members (and potential members) to discover what they think about staff development in your organisation?

Search terms:

Mandatory training, appraisal, practice development.

Planned and unplanned leave

Standard 8:

Ask:

- How is staff uplift calculated for nursing staff and does it take into account planned and unplanned leave?
- What are the current nursing staff absence rates?

Think about:

- Are there any hotspots where planned or unplanned leave of nursing staff impacts significantly on service provision?

- What are members telling you about the issue of planned or unplanned leave and absence?

Act:

- Is there a way for you to access information about staff absence rates so you can share and discuss

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Healthy workplaces have high quality employment practices and procedures which promote health, safety and wellbeing through several different domains including safety at work, dignity, development, work/life balance and by creating jobs that provide a degree of autonomy and control.

- Are there worrying trends or hotspots around, for example, complaints, stress levels, bullying or harassment?
- Does your organisation enforce its own policies and take action against discrimination?
- Do all parties demonstrate mutual respect for one another's roles and a commitment to fair process?

Act:

- Can you arrange for a session on the corporate induction programme to talk about the RCN?
- Is there a way for you to access information about bullying/harassment and stress levels so you can share and discuss it with your o u

- Where can you access information on investigations or disciplinary action involving nursing staff?

Think about:

- Does management/HR share data around trends, for example, raising concerns, grievance, disciplinary?
- Are there any concerning patterns around:
 - patient and/or nursing staff safety being potentially compromised
 - health and safety (H&S)/clinical risk monitoring procedures not being followed
 - nursing staff being subject to disciplinary action following patient incidents/accidents/near misses.
- Are there any patterns/hotspots, for example, particular service areas?
- Does management/HR work with you to minimise resorting to formal processes involving members?
- What are members across the organisation saying to you about accidents and incidents?

Act:

- Is there a way for you to access information about accidents, incidents and complaints so you can share and discuss it with your officer and other trade union rep colleagues?

- Can you bring an agenda item to your organisational health and safety committee about staff health and safety?
- Can you create an opportunity for colleagues to come together to share experiences of how safe they feel when they are at work?

Search terms:

- Raising concerns, grievance, disciplinary, accident and incident reporting.

Staff wellbeing

Standard 14:

Ask:

- What policies are in place around staff wellbeing and self-care?
- What initiatives are in place within the organisation to promote and support healthy lifestyle choices?
- What support is available for nursing staff through ocs(;)Tves a.7 (o)-2
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TAKING ACTION

What do you do if you've identified an area where your organisation isn't meeting the *Nursing Workforce Standards*?

What is the issue?

LV= are proud to be an approved partner of the RCN for Motor/Home/Travel/Pet Insurance.

DID YOU KNOW?

Our Regional managers attend national and regional events throughout the year and will be delighted to hear from you. They can provide LV= branded material to support your events, posters for worksite noticeboards etc. Please check below for your LV= contact

Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, North West, South West and West Midlands – Colette Baker – Tel 07867 558835 –

Eastern, East Midlands, London, Northern, South East and Yorkshire & Humber – Gavin Stroud – Tel 07855 964 926 –



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