

Overview of the RCN Foundation

Purpose and Activities

The RCN Foundation is an independent charity (registered charity number: SC043663 [Scotland]; 1134606 [England and Wales]; registered company: 7026001) and grant-maker which is part of the RCN Group. It was established in 2010, when the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) separated its charitable and trade union activities. The charity supports and strengthens nursing and midwifery to improve the health and wellbeing of the public. The charity supports nurses, midwives, Nursing Associates, healthcare support workers, student nurses and midwives, and retired nurses, midwives and healthcare support workers by:

- **Supporting** individual members of the nursing team by providing grants for financial hardship and education activities
- **Investing** in the future of the profession by funding projects in our key priority areas of care home nursing; supporting children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing, and learning disability nursing
- **Championing** nursing and midwifery by supporting projects that raise the profile of the profession, and help the public to better understand the contribution made by nursing and midwifery staff to improving the nation's health

The RCN Foundation supports staff across all of the nations of the UK, in both health and care settings. Our help is available to any nurse, midwife or healthcare support worker who needs it, irrespective of whether they are a member of the RCN.

Governance

Board of Trustees

The Board has provision for up to 12 Trustees, of which RCN Council is involved in the appointment of four Trustees. At least three of the Trustees must have no previous connection with the RCN. This enables the Foundation to retain its strong connections with the RCN whilst maintaining its independence. The Board of Trustees normally meets quarterly with the addition of an annual Board Awayday.

Committees

There are two substantive committees of the Board – the Grants Committee, and the Income Generation and Investment Committee – which meet on a quarterly basis.

- The Grants **Committee** is accountable to the Board for the development and implementation of the grant-making strategy which spans grant-making for hardship and education, nursing-led practice development and research projects; and activities that raise the profile of the profession.
- The **Income Generation and Investment Committee** is accountable to the Board for the development and delivery of the fundraising, marketing and communications strategy, as well as keeping the investment strategy under regular review and monitoring the performance of the investment manager.

Membership of committees consists of Trustees and External Advisers with a Trustee chairing each committee.

The Foundation also has an Appointments Panel, comprised of Trustees and External Advisers, which oversees the recruitment and appointment of Trustees, Chair and Vice Chair elections, and Committee appointments on behalf of the Board. It also oversees Trustees' induction, development programmes and performance review.

The Foundation has two Country Committees, one for Scotland and a second for Wales. The role of these Committees is to raise the profile of the Foundation's work in their respective countries; bring knowledge of the key country-specific issues affecting nursing, midwifery and healthcare to the attention of the Foundation; and aim to raise funds for the Foundation's work. Country Committees are chaired by a Trustee from the relevant country.

Our income

A significant proportion of the Foundation's income is generated from returns from its investment portfolio. In addition, the Foundation also generates income from a range of fundraising activities throughout the year.

Grant-making Activities

Since the Foundation was established, we have made significant progress in the three areas of our work.

Hardship grants

The RCN Foundation provides advice and hardship grants to those who are struggling financially for a number of reasons. Currently, this service is delivered in partnership with the RCN through its Lamplight Support Service. The Foundation funds in full the operational delivery cost of the Lamplight Support Service and the grants to beneficiaries, whilst the RCN provides the personnel and infrastructure required to deliver, monitor and evaluate the service.

Monitoring of the service has demonstrated its positive impact for beneficiaries. In 2020, 65% of callers to the service reported that they were better off financially as a result of the advice they were given. Furthermore, individuals who contacted the service were, on average, £5,800 better off per year as a result of the advice they were given. 70% of hardship grant recipients said that the grant increased their financial independence, and 30% said the grant would assist them in getting back to work.

Education and career development grants

The RCN Foundation provides grants for education and career development opportunities to nurses, midwives and healthcare support workers across the UK. Grants awarded are for activities that range from a one-off course in a wide range of clinical areas, to funding to support PhDs. Funding is awarded following a competitive application process so that the very best applicants are supported to develop and enhance their careers. In 2020, the Foundation provided grants of around £150,000 to 70 individuals.

Strategic nursing-led projects that improve patient care

Since 2010, the Foundation has funded a wide range of projects. These include:

- The refurbishment of the RCN Library and Heritage Centre, the largest nursing specific resource in Europe
- A major project to develop and evaluate the principles that underpin good care for dementia patients in both acute hospital and care home settings

- A number of projects aimed at providing nursing-led support to people with a learning disability, including on end of life care and the Coronavirus
- A Public Lecture series that aims to focus on key health issues, whilst increasing public understanding of the role and contribution of nursing
- A wide range of projects to support nurses providing care to older people in a care home setting. This has included the development of an education-career pathway for care home nurses, the development of a MOOC on the role of a care home nurse, and an animation to support revalidation for nurses working within the care home setting

In 2020, a major grant-giving programme of supporting and strengthening nursing in a care home setting came to an end. Two new priorities were agreed by the Board in relation to projects-based grant-making – nursing-led interventions that support children and young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing; and learning disability nursing.

Stakeholder engagement and scoping research to identify key issues on both of these themes has been undertaken. In 2021, the Foundation launched a new three-year funding programme on nursing-led interventions that support children and young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing, with the programme on learning disability to follow in 2022.

Further details about all of the Foundation’s grants programmes can be found on our website at www.rcnfoundation.org.uk.

Response to COVID-19

In April 2020, we launched our COVID-19 Support Fund to respond directly to the challenges faced by frontline nursing and midwifery staff across the UK who were at the forefront of battling the pandemic. The aim of the Fund was to provide emergency financial aid and psychological support to nursing and midwifery staff adversely affected by the pandemic. Between April and October 2020, the Foundation provided emergency hardship grants to nearly 3,300 frontline staff to the value of £1.45 million.

The Foundation also funded a number of COVID-19 related projects. These included funding for the Institute of Health Visiting to develop, implement and evaluate a programme of promoting emotional wellbeing at work for small groups of health visitors (HVs) working in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project will develop and provide a virtual group support programme for HVs based upon a restorative supervision model.

The Foundation will also be funding two further projects: one to carry out a mixed methods exploratory study to examine the impact of effective leadership strategies on nurses' and midwives' experiences of practicing during the pandemic; and a second focussed on an evaluation of Psychological First Aid as an intervention on psychological outcomes for nursing teams working within the care home sector throughout the pandemic.

In response to a gap in accessible and appropriate information for people with learning disabilities and/or autism, the Foundation funded the charity Beyond Words to develop a wordless picture story called *Beating the Virus*, to help people with learning disabilities to better understand COVID-19 and to cope with the additional constraints that it has imposed. Funding was awarded to a second project aimed at people with learning disabilities and was awarded in early 2021, this time on the COVID-19 vaccine. This is a joint project between the University of Hertfordshire and the charity Beyond Words.

A significant priority for the Foundation has been the mental health of members of the professions themselves. To that end, we commissioned The King's Fund to undertake a review of the mental health of nurses and midwives in direct response to the pandemic. The resulting report, *The Courage of Compassion*, has gained significant traction across the sector and further follow-up work is planned. A follow up webinar held in December saw over 4,600 people register for the event, with over 2,000 viewing live.

Finally, the Foundation has developed an online repository of information and resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of nursing and midwifery staff. The repository is housed on the Foundation's website.