



Royal College
of Midwives

So you want to be a RCM

**workplace
representative**

So you want to be a RCM Workplace Representative



“The Royal College of Midwives is the only professional organisation and trade union that is solely dedicated to the promotion, representation and support of student midwives, midwives, maternity support workers (MSWs) and the midwifery profession in the UK.

RCM Workplace Representatives are the backbone of the RCM. Representing and supporting members is a demanding role, which carries with it hard work and serious responsibilities. Yet it can also be very satisfying, especially on those occasions when you are able to win a fair deal for our members. The skills that you attain in the role will assist you in your career and personal and professional development.

This booklet is designed to provide you with basic information to help you in deciding whether to undertake this role and to invite you to join fellow midwives and MSWs in this exciting challenge.”

Gill Walton

Chief Executive

Royal College of Midwives



Many of the representatives, because of the skills they have developed in their roles have gone on to greater things, whether that is with the RCM, in the NHS or indeed the government. They really are the unsung heroes of the RCM and I thank them for their engagement.”

Gill Adgie

Acting Country Director, Scotland

“The role of the workplace representative can not be under estimated. Without these individuals who are willing to give their time and energies the RCM would struggle to provide a service at the point of need.

The Royal College of Midwives is a member of the Trade Union Congress (TUC)





One of the objectives of the RCM is to recruit a steward, health and safety representative and Learning Representative (LR) in every workplace. Could it be you?

- Are you a member of the Royal College of Midwives?
- Are you involved with the Royal College of Midwives?
- Do you take an interest in matters that affect your colleagues in general?
- Do you understand the issues facing midwives and MSWs?

If you can answer yes to any of these questions, then why not consider becoming an RCM workplace representative. The role of the RCM workplace representative is varied, interesting and demanding. It is a responsible position that can also be frustrating and thankless, but overall it is extremely rewarding and enables you to develop many new and transferable skills.

“Being a steward is not always easy but it is certainly rewarding. Although I was reluctant to take on the role I have no regrets and would encourage anyone considering the role to take the plunge. They will become politically more aware and savvy. Doors are opened that you thought were closed and you meet lots of new people from all over the country and from other unions/ professional organisations.”

RCM Steward

“I became a LR for two reasons. Firstly to re-invigorate the branch and secondly to make the proactive, exciting offer of learning to everyone in the maternity department.”

RCM Learning Representative

“I believe that being a Health and Safety Representative has assisted in my career development as I now manage a clinical area where I have responsibility for the health and safety of patients and staff and the implementation and monitoring of infection control measures.”

RCM Health and Safety Representative

What does an RCM Steward do?



Being an RCM Steward can be a very varied job.

No two workplaces are the same, and the situations a steward can encounter will differ from those of stewards in other workplaces/trusts/boards. However, most of a steward's responsibilities will fall into the following areas.

- Representing midwives and MSWs in your workplace/trust/board when necessary.
- Recruiting midwives, MSWs and student midwives into the RCM.
- Providing advice and act as a spokesperson for the RCM.
- Performing individual casework.
- Providing feedback to members at meetings.
- Supporting the RCM National/Regional Officer.
- Attending Joint Staff Committee (JSC) and working in partnership with other NHS Unions.

I've been a RCM Steward for 6 years. The out going steward asked me to take over the role but it wasn't an easy decision and I only agreed after a lot of persuasion.

RCM members seek my advice and representation on a range of issues including sickness, injuries at work, disciplinaries, bullying and harassment and off duty in fact anything that is an issue to them.

Although representing RCM members is sometimes emotionally and psychologically draining being able to help my colleagues and hopefully making a difference to their working lives is extremely satisfying.

My role is made easier by the support of my employer, the RCM Branch and my RCM Regional Officer.

Initially I was given one long shift a month (12hrs) to undertake my duties but I was also allowed time to attend some meetings out side of this. I am currently staff side vice chair and receive 14.5hrs a week to do both RCM and staff side duties."

RCM Steward

What does an RCM Learning Representative do?



Learning Representatives are workplace representatives who assist and advise other members on their training and development needs and promote opportunities to access lifelong learning.

A Learning Representative's duties will fall into the following areas.

- Promoting a positive attitude to learning and skills.
- Assisting members to take up promotion and progression opportunities.
- Advising members on meeting the criteria of the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF).

- Providing accessible independent advice and support for members about learning in the workplace.
- Advising on RCM learning resources and events.
- Helping develop a 'learning culture' where training and education is available and valued by all.

"I have a passion for learning and development and was keen to get more involved in the RCM so becoming a LR was perfect for me.

I find the LR role exciting as it gives me the ability to promote learning opportunities in the hospital and stimulate interest in lifelong learning among staff. I'm currently using the role to work closely with the Trust's training department to introduce apprenticeships for MSWs. The Trust's learning and development manager was impressed with the learning survey I circulated to members, as it gave an independent view of the kind of work-related and other learning staff would benefit from.

I plan to collate and build information and knowledge about learning opportunities in the Trust and with local colleges so that I can have a library of information on hand for members."

RCM Learning Representative

What does an RCM Health and Safety Representative do?



Health and Safety Representatives have specific duties and responsibilities and also have important legal rights.

A Health and Safety Representative will be responsible for the following.

- Investigating potential hazards and investigate the causes of accidents.
- Making representations to the employers on health, safety and welfare matters.
- Investigating complaints of RCM members on these issues.
- Carrying out inspections in accordance with Health & Safety Regulations.
- Attending meetings of the Safety Committee.
- Liaising with the Health & Safety Executive.
- The lead on Caring for You in the workplace/branch

“I’ve been a health and safety representative for 5 years. I volunteered with a colleague whilst we were undertaking training in manual handling. I have a genuine interest in health and safety and we both wanted to raise its profile in the unit.

Members seek information on a range of issues including manual handling, risk assessment and guidance in complex cases with health and safety implications. I have also been involved in consultations on changes to working hours and shift times which require a good understanding of the Working Time Regulations to be able to effectively respond.

The best thing about being a health and safety representative is the ability to get information easily and being able to keep up to date with issues that effect members locally.”

RCM Health and Safety Representative

What is in it for me?

- Acquisition of easily transferable skills that will assist in your career development.
- A role in contributing to the changing role of the midwifery team.
- Gaining greater knowledge of the midwifery profession and service developments.
- Increased confidence and self-esteem.
- Training in employment and professional matters.
- The satisfaction of making a difference to members' working lives, helping others.
- Reasonable time off to carry out your duties and to undertake training.

“Beyond a shadow of a doubt being an RCM Steward improved my confidence, political astuteness, people skills, and negotiation skills. It also helped me recognise and steer my career down the path I wish to follow.”

Head of Midwifery

“Since 1989 I have held positions continuously within the local RCM Branch including that of Chair and Secretary. I was elected as a Steward in 1997 and became Secretary of Staff Side at my Trust in 2002.

A Non-Executive Director of the Trust invited me to participate in NHS research with the UK Work Organisation Network (UKWON) after he heard me speak in my role as a Steward at a Trust event. UKWON is a not-for-profit research and consultancy organisation with a particular interest in quality of working life. I was subsequently appointed as a Director of UKWON, a role which I now combine with that of Labour Suite Co-ordinator and Steward. I also believe that my experience as Steward led to my secondment as Improving Working Lives Lead within the Strategic Health Authority between 2004 and 2006.

In 2007 I was elected to the RCM Council and have served on several committees including Employment Relations and the Ethics Advisory Committee, which I currently Chair.

I'm in no doubt that my experience as an RCM Steward has contributed greatly to the success of my career. In particular I have gained confidence in working at Board and senior management level and have improved my communication and presentation skills. I am certainly more able to analyse and resolve complex situations and mediate between conflicting points of view. I've also gained a wide knowledge of how Trusts operate in the broader NHS context together with experience of working alongside other unions and professional bodies. It has been especially valuable to learn about employee rights and to gain an understanding of good HR practice.

I am proud to be in a position where I can support Midwives and their rights at a very difficult time for the NHS.”

RCM Steward/Member of RCM Board

How will the RCM help me?

The RCM will do the following to support you.

- Provide dedicated training on an ongoing basis including a range of courses on i-learn, the RCM's e-learning platform.
- Assist in your professional development.
- Support you whenever it can.
- Provide specialist advice on employment and professional matters.
- Give access to Regional Officers/National Officers Learning representatives and Organisers for advice and support.



“I have a very good working relationship with my Regional Officer who gives me all the support that I need when I need it. The RCM study days for workplace representatives are very informative and equip me with the skills I need to make my role as a steward somewhat easier. My local RCM branch also gives me incredible support and encouragement.”

RCM Steward

“I network with a number of other RCM ULRs that I met on the RCM Training Course.”

RCM Learning Representative

How do I become a Workplace Representative?

You need to be a member of the RCM.

Inform the Branch Secretary of your RCM branch that you are interested in becoming a workplace representative. He/she will then arrange for the election to take place at the next branch meeting. If you are not sure who the branch secretary please contact your RCM National/Regional Officer. Contact details are on the opposite page.

If the RCM Branch is inactive the National/Regional Officer will arrange a workplace meeting to have the election.

Your details are then sent to the RCM who will accredit you and send details of your accreditation to your employer. An accredited workplace

representative is legally entitled to paid time off to undertake their duties and activities and to attend training courses.

Further information

Further information including role definitions for each of the roles can be found on the RCM website, www.rcm.org.uk/wpr

To find out more:

Contact your RCM Regional Officer if you work in England or Northern Ireland. Contact your National Officer if you work in Scotland or Wales. The contact number is **0300 303 0444**.

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