



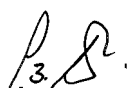
# Foreword

Any provider of health services today is aiming to provide high quality services to the community they serve, in an environment of ever increasing financial constraints. Significant levels of productivity and efficiencies are required while, at the same time, improving, protecting and developing the quality of services.

The majority of employers recognise that their most valuable resource is their staff, however, in today's climate, organisations face challenges in promoting lifelong learning, and often find it difficult to provide effective learning opportunities that provide value for money and engage staff.

I believe that the RCN can work with you to formulate a meaningful and relevant learning agreement that sets out our commitment to learning.

We can use collective resources and expertise to provide staff with effective and engaging lifelong learning and help you to maintain highly skilled and motivated staff.



Dr Peter Carter, OBE

RCN General Secretary & Chief Executive



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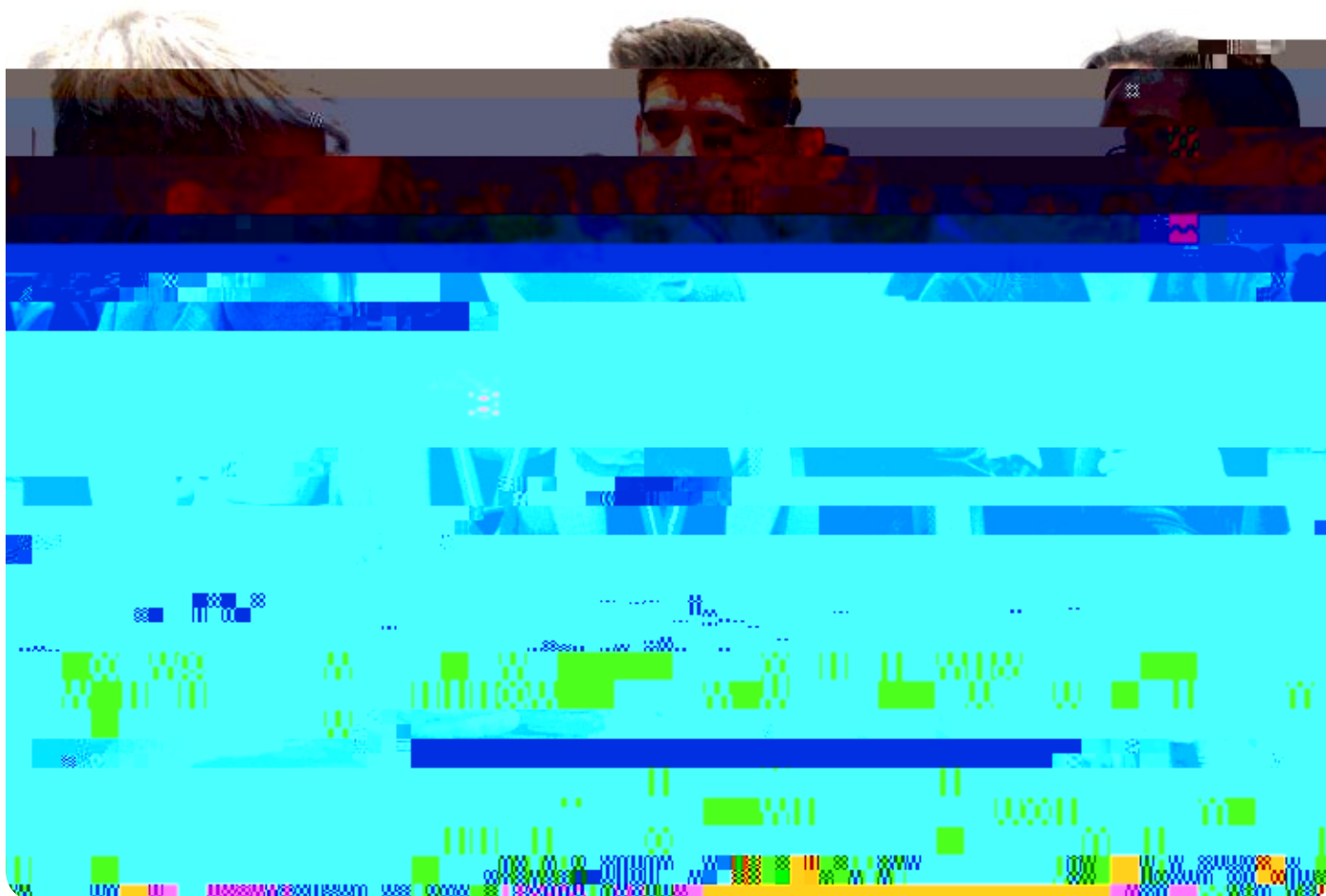
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## 2. Quality standards and patient care – why learning matters

The public expect all health and social care providers will have adequately trained staff who possess the necessary skills, competencies and knowledge to provide effective care and treatment. A health and social care provider, committed to the promotion of excellent care, understands that a crucial element of providing a quality service is the continuing development of staff.

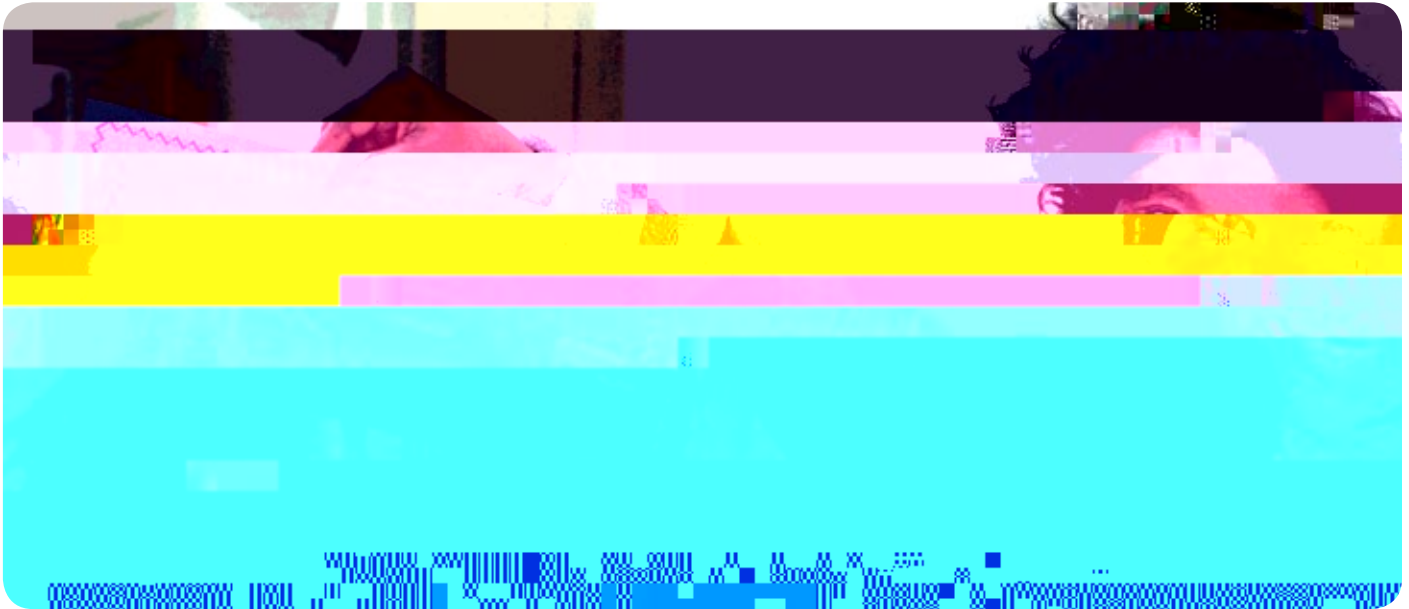
Professional and quality regulators clearly acknowledge this connection by including learning as part of the standards on which organisations can be assessed. Where an organisation fails to meet standards of patient care, either broadly or in specific incidents, learning is the key to raising standards.

The RCN has always put learning at the heart of patient care, and by developing a learning agreement with the RCN you will be engaging staff in a different and dynamic way.

1. Learning agreements that are supported by an action plan and committee can use union mechanisms (learning representatives, branch meetings, casework) to identify learning needs that may not be raised in appraisals or incident reports, making your training needs analysis more far reaching.
2. Learning representatives can support both staff and managers with personal development plans and appraisals, and ensure members know what support is on offer and how to access it.
3. A learning agreement can reflect the needs of the organisation, taking into consideration workforce delivery plans and patient care.

Learning agreements ensure staff have a voice, can influence your learning and development strategies, and provide evidence of your commitment to learning. Employees engaged with learning help promote your brand and protect the organisation from the risks associated with poor patient care.

### 3. Working together to ensure value for money



For some private health and social care providers, finding the funding to keep learning



## 4. Employee engagement – why learning is valued by your staff

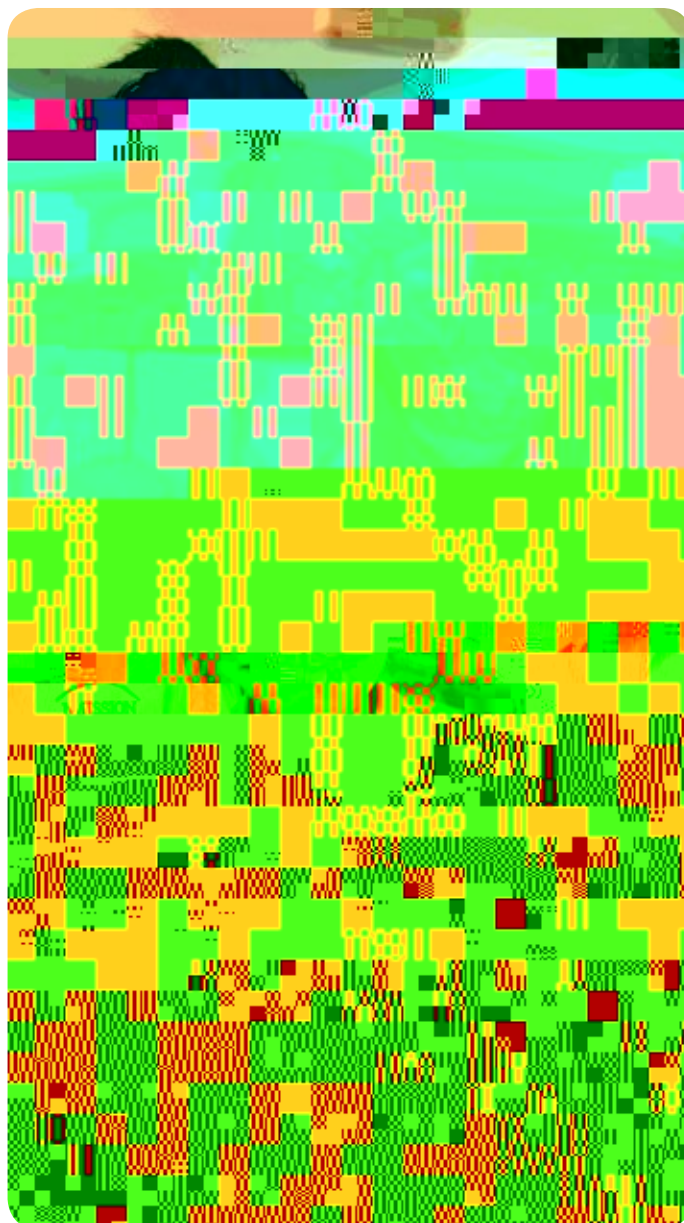
Effective managers know that staff engagement occurs when workers feel and act positively towards the work they do, their colleagues, and the organisation that they work for. Two major themes in employee engagement are ‘supporting personal development’ and ‘enabling involvement in decision making’.

For staff to be engaged, managers need to provide learning and development. But that is not necessarily enough to engage them.

Engaging all employees in learning and development can be challenging as there may be barriers, many of which may be personal. An employee may have had poor experiences of education and training or feel that they are not ‘cut out for learning’. Perhaps they feel their job is at risk and that there is ‘no point’. Shift patterns could make learning seem inaccessible or it may seem that nothing is really relevant to where they are now, or where they want to be in the future.

Learning agreements cannot meet all the learning and development needs and challenges faced by employers in the current climate, and any work carried out through this partnership is complementary to the HR and training function of the organisation. However, a learning agreement, supported by an action plan, committee and learning representatives, gives you a unique connection to your employees.

RCN learning representatives can engage with staff, providing information and support and gathering information at a personal level to compliment the analysis you undertake as an employer. The learning agreement, committee and action plan, enable you to take that information and work with it at a strategic level. Research by Heyes and Stuart (1998) revealed that training activity is enhanced where trade unions are actively involved in training decisions.

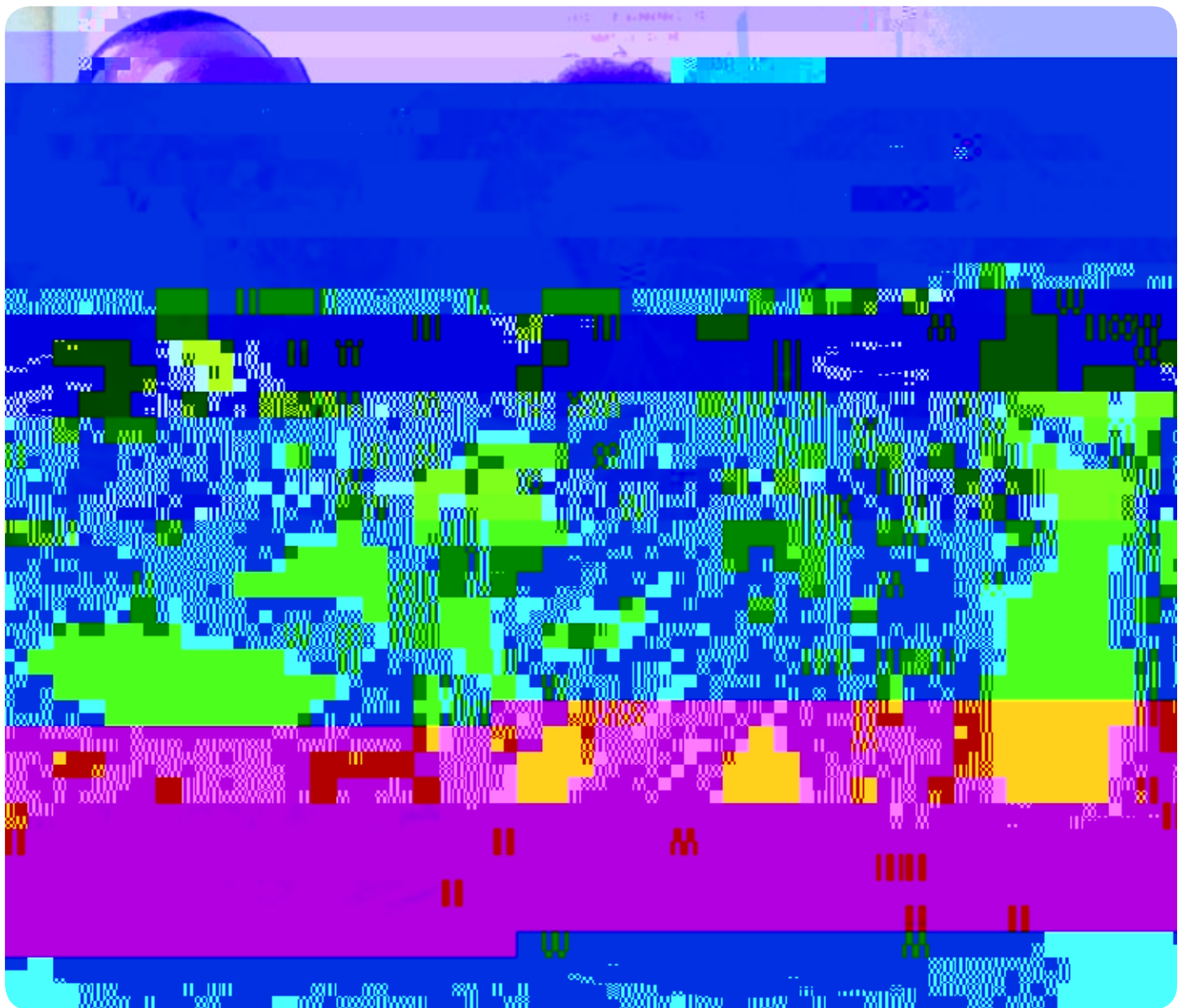


– where an effective learning agreement is in place, staff are engaged at a personal level, but have a voice at a strategic level. Those ‘hard to reach’ learners are identified, helping you to ensure your plans are inclusive. It’s an extra offer that is definitely worth considering.



## 5. Improved recruitment and retention

A learning agreement with the RCN extends your current offer to potential new recruits (both at the point of job advert and selection) while opening the way to retaining those already in your employment to give your organisation a boost in the difficult and expensive arena of recruitment and retention. Through its Learning Zone, the RCN offers learning resources that are suitable and specific to all – from apprentice HCAs to high level clinical staff.



## 6. First steps to a learning partnership with the RCN

You'll find we've made it easy to start a learning partnership thanks to agreement templates that form the basis for negotiation and the development of your unique action plan.

To take the first step, simply email us at [learning.agreements@rcn.org.uk](mailto:learning.agreements@rcn.org.uk). We will arrange to meet with you to discuss the benefits and the process of developing a learning agreement specific to your organisation. We will also work with any other union that you recognise to draw up draft agreement ready for negotiations.

A blank template for a learning agreement for independent health care sector employers can be downloaded in Microsoft Word format from [www.rcn.org.uk/learning\\_agreement\\_independent](http://www.rcn.org.uk/learning_agreement_independent)



