

the RCN. They also provide professional development opportunities for nurses. The Branches are co-ordinated by RCN Boards in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and by Regional Offices in England.

- 1.9 Branch members elect RCN stewards and safety representatives. Stewards and safety representatives represent members in the work place on a variety of issues, both individual and collective. They receive education and training provided by the RCN and are supported by RCN staff through the Regional and Board offices.
- 1.10 There are 14 RCN offices throughout England situated in the Council member constituency. RCN officers cover areas of responsibility (patches). There is a RCN Branch for Greater Bristol and also an RCN officer responsible for the Bristol area. The South Western RCN office covers the South Western Division including Bristol.
- 1.11 The RCN has a long history of supporting developments in the field of nursing quality and audit in the United Kingdom. A dedicated quality and audit unit, the Dynamic Quality Improvement Programme, has focused on developing work, including the following:
- Developing a philosophy and framework for nursing quality evaluation
 - Developing systems for quality evaluation in health care
 - Developing specialist guidelines and standards
 - Undertaking research and development
- 1.12 In 1995, the RCN (jointly with the Royal College of Midwives and with funding from the Department of Health) established a Nursing and Midwifery Audit Information Service. This service provides practical support and advice relating to the implementation of quality improvement, clinical effectiveness and audit in practice and is freely available to all nurses and midwives in the UK. Specific services include a literature enquiry service, a contacts list, clinical guidelines and projects database and referral advice. The Nursing and Midwifery Audit Information Service will be linking closely with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. A guidance paper on clinical governance has been produced and educational events are in progress to support the implementation of clinical governance in practice. Complementary developments relating to clinical supervision, clinical leadership development and continuing professional development are also being progressed within the RCN Institute.
- 1.13 Drawing on the specialist knowledge of the membership groups within the RCN, an initial programme of work to develop national standards for particular speciality areas was undertaken during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This resulted in the production of standards for a whole range of specialist subjects, including paediatric nursing, school nursing, radiology nursing, cancer nursing, nursing and older people, and gynaecological nursing.
- 1.14 The idea behind these types of specialist documents was that local practitioners could use them as a guide for developing standards within their own clinical area. More recently, however, the focus has moved towards developing evidence-based national guidelines for specific clinical topics, for example, the management of venous leg ulcers, the assessment of pain in children and the assessment and prevention of pressure ulcers. The shift from developing specialist standards of practice to more focused guidelines has been a response to the growing emphasis on