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Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
Senedd
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25 April 2025

Dear Buffy,

The Royal College of Nursing Wales remains deeply concerned about Cardiff University's plans for nursing education, which involve teaching fewer undergraduates. I enclose a copy of our public response to the consultation which may be of interest to Committee members.

There are, as I know you are aware, significant difficulties in higher education in Wales at present and I very much welcome your decision to seek information from the Vice-Chancellors and Directors of all Welsh universities to better understand the challenges.

However, there are several reasons why nursing as a higher education subject is particularly vulnerable. **I therefore strongly urge you to open a one-day inquiry into nursing in higher education in Wales.**

I believe that the Children, Young People and Education Committee is best placed to do this. The topic of nursing in higher education has often been exclusively left to those in the health domain but I think it is vitally important to stimulate public policy discussion on nursing in higher education for the following reasons:

1) The Welsh Government needs to support nursing research.

Nursing research improves patient care. Both clinical and public policy nursing research need investment – to attract top nursing students, strengthen Wales's healthcare policies, and build a solid career framework for nursing lecturers. To do all this and make

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Wales the best place to study nursing, the Welsh government needs to work with all higher education institutions to develop a nursing education strategy.

2) The nurse educator workforce is being eroded just when patients need it to grow.

RCN Wales is very concerned about the impact of redundancy schemes on the workforce and the way that expertise has been eroded and shrinking at a time when we need to be growing education capacity and expertise to deliver the future nursing workforce.

A registered nurse who works in higher education is both an academic professional and a nursing professional. But the shape of the academic nursing workforce has changed in the last few years, with nurses today entering academia much earlier in their careers. To ensure continued high quality nursing education and research in Wales, the Welsh Government must work with

higher education institutions to ensure these nursing staff are supported and funded to carry out nursing research and develop their careers as academics and as registered nurses. Higher education institutions need support to continue delivering high-quality nursing research as well as nursing education. Nursing departments are not a major income-generating activity for universities. Not only does the cost of organising clinical placements and length of the course add to the complexity of course administration, nurse lecturers also need to maintain their clinical practice. This means that without additional support, nursing departments can find it difficult to participate and publish research that is attractive to HEIs.

Here are just two positive examples of the difference nursing researchers and research make to Wales.

Dr Clare Bennett, a Reader in Health Improvement at Cardiff University, also co-directs the Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care. She leads a research, innovation and knowledge exchange programme which is making a difference to the lives of children and young people and to the organisation of health services. In 2024, her work was recognised in the RCN Wales Nurse of the Year awards, where she won the “Research, Innovation and Digitalisation in Nursing” category.

Sian Thomas, a consultant nurse for child health at Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, carried out research on the safety of blended diets as a way of controlling weight loss, vomiting, and diarrhoea in children who need a feeding tube – around 200 children in Wales each year. Her research led to nationwide change in practice and a change in British Dietetic Association policy, with endorsement from the Welsh Government and all health boards in Wales.

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3) The current education commissioning process fails to support HEIs to collaborate, innovate, and address challenges collectively.

At present, the way HEIW commissions and funds nursing education works as a commercial tendering process creating competition between HEIs and reducing opportunities for collaboration. [Cardiff University has made this case strongly](#), describing such collaboration as “crucial to preserving provision at a time when university finances are under pressure and student numbers are falling” and saying that the current situation “undermines the Welsh Government’s and Medr’s desire to have a more collaborative and differentiated sector”.

Given that Wales is a small country with a strong tradition of social partnership, and that the Welsh Government commissions nursing education, there is no reason why Wales should not have the best offer for nursing students in the United Kingdom. In that spirit, it would be more effective to support HEIs to work as a group, and work in partnership with health boards, to share insights and develop a coherent, strategic approach. A sufficiently adaptive and flexible commissioning process could permit institutions to develop their offer in line with their strengths—for example, rural health or learning disability nursing.

This differentiation would help safeguard plurality and diversity of nursing education provision in Wales, reducing the risk of losing undergraduate students, but also postgraduates and researchers, to institutions elsewhere.

4) Nursing students face a unique set of challenges.

The three years of full-time study required for a nursing degree typically consist of 42 working weeks a year – considerably more than a typical academic year. Nursing students spend half their degree on practical placements in NHS Wales and independent sector health and social care settings. A placement is a learning opportunity, not a job, and this is why students on placements are *supernumerary*. This means they are not counted as – and should not be relied on as – part of the workforce.

For students, the length and demanding nature of the degree leaves little room for part-time employment, which means that numerous students experience financial hardship whilst undertaking their education. A UK wide RCN survey found that 31% of nursing students had dependent children, 10% were single parents and 23% were caring for a sick, disabled or elderly relative. While some students can and do supplement their student funding with shifts on the NHS “bank”, nursing students remain heavily reliant on student funding.

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Developing scholarships to support people from disadvantaged backgrounds to study nursing, and using increased funding as an incentive to pursue careers in shortage areas such as mental health and learning disability nursing, would help the funding model become more responsive to current need.

A focused public inquiry on these nursing issues is both long overdue and essential to a complete picture of the crisis facing higher education in Wales. My view is that the CYPE committee is the right body to carry it out.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



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Cardiff University's proposal to discontinue nurse education

Consultation response

About the Royal College of Nursing (RCN)

The Royal College of Nursing is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing, representing over 500,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, health care support workers and nursing students, including over 30,500 members in Wales. RCN members work in both the independent sector and the NHS. Around two-thirds of our members are based in the community. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with National Boards in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in nursing practice and shapes health and social care policy.

RCN Wales is very alarmed by Cardiff University's proposal to discontinue nurse education. We were also disappointed in the way we learnt about the proposal via the media without warning. This proposal directly impacts nurse academics and student members alike and has far reaching implications for patients and the public. This proposal comes at a time when there are an estimated 2000 vacancies of registered nurses across Wales and shocking accounts of corridor care across services.

The city of Cardiff, and Cardiff University, have a long history of providing undergraduate and postgraduate nurse education which commenced in 1972 in what was then the Welsh National School of Medicine. The nursing courses provided at Cardiff University across undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research attract students and staff from within Wales, the rest of the UK and across the world. Cardiff University has an excellent reputation for bringing together high-quality nurse education and research with impact ranked 1st in Wales, 5th in the UK, and 51st in the world for nursing. This leads to exceptional nursing care and practice across the capital and beyond, delivering a local workforce, developing existing nurses and generating knowledge and research.

Implications for Workforce

Applications and recruitment to undergraduate nursing programmes across the UK have fallen and Cardiff University is not unique in facing this challenge. RCN Wales recognises that the institution must operate in a research-intensive environment as a Russell Group

university ensuring high levels of research output, attracting the best students and competing globally. Yet Cardiff University has a civic duty to consider its role in developing and delivering the future nursing workforce both locally and nationally for Wales. The very idea of discontinuing nurse education is out of line with Cardiff University's own strategy,¹ launched in 2024, which is to "act as an anchor institution in our city-region, delivering cultural, social, economic and environmental benefit for Cardiff". The delivery of nurse education is not simply about numbers of undergraduate nursing students: having institutions with the resources, capacity and expertise to deliver nurse education in the right location(s) is crucial to this. Cardiff University stands out for its location, reputation, and research-intensive culture.

Over the last 2 years we have seen a steady increase in applications to study nursing in Wales, alongside record levels of commissioning, therefore it would seem that renegotiating the size and scale of Cardiff's provision with Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) is needed to deliver nurse education sustainably. Nursing as a subject brings in a significant amount of funding, whilst we recognise the need for universities to be able to plan their business sustainably, a decline in student recruitment is not a rationale for the discontinuation of the subject. As the professional body for nursing in Wales we expect to be involved in discussions exploring potential solutions to avoid job losses for nurse academics and maintain the subject. RCN Wales is concerned about the lack of detail of the equality impact assessment of these proposals. Given that nursing is a female dominated workforce we would have expected to have seen detailed information of the assessment and reassurance that the potential for discrimination against women had been fully considered.

Implications for Postgraduate Provision and Inter-professional Education

Nursing is for many a lifelong career and having access to high quality postgraduate provision is essential for retaining and developing a highly skilled nursing workforce to meet the ambitious strategic nursing workforce plan for Wales. Any loss of postgraduate provision is a matter of great concern at a time when Wales needs to be growing its advanced and consultant nurse workforce, in line with the Enhanced, Advanced and Consultant Framework for Wales. Nurse academics teach across multiprofessional provision and have been fundamental in the establishment of this model and its continuing success. Service development projects undertaken by students have clearly demonstrated the positive impact of the interprofessional postgraduate provision on care delivery. Service transformation initiatives have led to Alumni of Cardiff University winning awards such as the RCN Wales Nurse of Year, exhibiting the impact that this education has forged. Furthermore, nurse academics' contribution and passion for developing advanced level practice globally is evident, with senior representation on national forums and the development of policy in advanced practice in the UK. Any loss of this provision, which has advanced countless nursing careers and improved patient outcomes, would be significant not only for aspiring professionals but also for patients, their families and the wider community.

¹ <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/about/our-profile/strategy/our-future-together>

Furthermore, this decision does not reflect the importance of other healthcare students learning inter-professionally alongside nurses and the significant contribution of nurse academics across the healthcare professions and to advancing practice. Up until most recently, Cardiff University has worked to develop and enhance inter-professional education across its provision and the continuation of nursing as a subject is a crucial endeavour as all professions learn and work alongside nurses in practice. In addition, there has been a significant investment in simulation, both in terms of capital investment and academic resource; nurse academics have been fundamental in leading this innovation and development. Programmes for educating healthcare professionals do not exist in isolation from each other, not only do nurse academics teach across professions, but the facilities for teaching these courses are also shared. The number of students on nursing degree courses is typically far larger than those for other healthcare professions. Without the numbers of students provided by nursing education, the viability of maintaining the modern buildings that house the university's advanced teaching and simulation facilities will be called into question. This proposal could introduce new risks to the future of the education programmes for other healthcare professions at Cardiff University.

Implications for the RCN Wales Research Chair and Nursing Research

External reviews of the quality of the research which has been undertaken in the School of Healthcare Science shows that it is recognised for its quality, relevance and real world impact. Cardiff has developed a global reputation in relation to this and members of staff are involved in editorial boards of some of the highest impact journals, as well as being involved in international research projects. To this end nurse academics have made a significant contribution not only to nursing research but also to interdisciplinary research, attracting significant amounts of external funding from competitive organisations such as National Institute of Health and Care Research; Health and Care Research Wales. This funding supports PGR students and contributes to an ecosystem that exists between teaching, research, and knowledge generation which in turn benefits patients and the public in Wales. In addition, The Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care, which enables the utilisation of interdisciplinary research in clinical practice has been developed, led and is currently directed by nurse academics.

It is for this reason that the RCN Wales Research Chair has been hosted by Cardiff university for so many years as the RCN recognised the environment and culture that Cardiff offers for this Professorship to impact on health research. Funds for the RCN Research Chair were raised by RCN members and the citizens of Wales in 1988. The funds were entrusted to be invested by Cardiff University, and we have worked in synergy with them ever since. Recent impact of the RCN Chair has included helping to secure funded Masters Fellowships in Nursing for the next 5 years (one national one international) from the Burdett Charity for Nursing. Other examples include giving oral evidence to the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016.

Implications for the Nursing Profession

The proposal to discontinue nursing as a subject within what has been a thriving School of Healthcare Sciences, devalues nursing at a time when workforce development is most

crucial. There is a robust evidence base that graduate nurses provide high quality care, reduce patient mortality and improve patient outcomes. To deliver the future nursing workforce, we need a range of education providers across Wales to meet the needs of our diverse and aging population. A Russell Group University delivering nurse education in Wales raises the profile and importance of the profession. This enables the subject to be taught in an environment that is research intensive, which develops the evidence base and continues to progress the profession beyond traditions. Therefore, it is especially important that historical, reputable and esteemed institutions choose to deliver nursing, and we would urge Cardiff University to take the actions below:

- Explore the alternative proposals put forward by our members and work with us as their professional body to implement these.
- Mitigate risks to workforce in its widest sense and protect jobs at all costs by ensuring there are no compulsory redundancies.
- Safeguard future nurse-led research and knowledge generation.
- Proactively engage with Welsh Government in relation to your civic responsibility and requirement to work in social partnership.
- Communicate transparently with HEIW to enable nurse education to continue at Cardiff University.
- Thoroughly explore the risks to interprofessional education and research.

RCN Wales Nurse of the Year Alumni with affiliation to Cardiff University:

Name / Year / Category	Specialism and Winning Area	Contribution and Connection to Cardiff University
Tim Nicholls, Specialist Nurse of the Year Award, 2024, winner	Tim is a clinical specialist nurse in dementia care, his work enhances patient and their families' experiences of dementia care in community and inpatient settings.	Tim studied Mental Health Nursing at Cardiff University 2004 –2007, upon registration Tim went to work in Mental Health Services for Older people for Cardiff and Vale. The education Tim received has inspired his career and culminated with him recently winning the Specialist Nurse of the year award at the most recent RCN awards.
Dr Clare Bennett – Research, Digitalisation and Innovation Award 2024, winner	Clare is a Reader in Health Improvement, and leads a programme of research, innovation and knowledge exchange which is making a difference to the lives of children and young people and to the organisation of health services across Wales and beyond.	Clare completed her PhD at Cardiff University's in 2016 and returned as an academic in 2018. Clare has made a significant contribution to service delivery within Wales through her work in the field of evidence implementation, multidisciplinary research and teaching across all the health professions (undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD). Clare also co-directs the Wales Centre for Evidence-Based Care at Cardiff University, which supports a variety of multidisciplinary teams in determining the best approaches to patient care and service delivery.
Tara Rees, 2023, Overall, Winner	As Lead Hepatology Clinical Nurse Specialist at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, Tara is a clinical expert in the field. She has worked at an advanced level to advocate for a vulnerable patient cohort and has dedicated her career to building new	Tara is a Cardiff Alumni and currently works as a Lead Hepatology Clinical Nurse Specialist for Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. She has led on national accreditation for her hepatology service and been lead nurse for the All-Wales Liver Disease Delivery plan.

	services. Tara demonstrated her passion for improving patient experience by creating new services for those with specialist needs.	
Nelson Selvaraj Nurse Education Category 2023, winner	Nelson is a lecturer (Adult Nursing) at the School of Healthcare Sciences and his background is critical care. He leads drug calculation numeracy for nursing which is integral to ensuring that students meet programme requirements for drug calculation competencies. Nelson was instrumental in enhancing the student experience when supporting students with numeracy assessment improving student success. During the COVID pandemic, he collaborated with other experienced critical care lecturers and delivered two-full days of teaching and simulation to support the covid response training more than 200 ward-based staff nurses and other allied healthcare professionals.	Nelson was awarded Masters in Critical Care by Cardiff University's School of Medicine in 2015 and started his career as an academic. Since then, he has been leading and delivering various clinical skills / simulation-based sessions across the nursing programme and working collaboratively across schools to support inter-professional education (IPE). Nelson successfully secured funding from Research Capacity Building Collaboration (RCBC), Wales in 2023 to undertake a scoping review exploring the challenges experienced by Intensive Care Unit nurses during the organ donation process and presented his findings at local and national conferences. He is a trustee of the Believe Organ Donor Support charity, Wales.
Diana De, Nurse Education Award 2023, runner up	Diana is currently a Reader in Adult Nursing at Cardiff University. Diana is thoroughly committed to two key educational areas-cultural awareness in educational programmes and delivering the Return to Practice (RTP) programme.	Diana is currently a Reader in Adult Nursing at Cardiff University. During her time as a Senior Lecturer at the university, Diana developed and led a new Global Health module on the Bachelor of Nursing programme, promoting equality and diversity in health care settings on a local, national and international level. She works hard to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion are championed in Cardiff University's School of Healthcare Sciences and conveyed to students through innovative and engaging sessions.
Louise Hymers – Community Nursing Award 2023, winner	Louise is a Macmillan Lead Nurse for Cancer and Palliative Care, who is passionate about improving end-of-life care.	Louise achieved her MSc in Palliative Care in 2018 at Cardiff University and is currently practicing as a Macmillan Lead Nurse for Cancer and Palliative Care at Powys Teaching Health Board, Louise is also undertaking a part time secondment within the NHS Executive as Lead Nurse Cancer Nursing Workforce within the National Strategic Clinical Network for Cancer.
Professor Paul Gill, Research Award 2023, winner	Paul was a Senior Lecturer in Adult Nursing with a clinical background in critical care nursing. Paul is a dedicated and committed researcher with a career-long goal to improve patient outcomes. An experienced research mentor and supervisor, Paul has nurtured researchers at all stages and facilitated those pursuing a research career pathway.	Paul was a Senior Lecturer (Adult Nursing) and completed his PhD at Cardiff University in 2007. During his time at Cardiff University, Paul taught undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students, and was joint Operational Group Lead for Research Capacity Building Collaboration Wales (RCBC), an all-Wales collaboration to increase the capacity and capability of research in nursing, midwifery and allied health professional groups.
Professor Judith Carrier, Supporting Improvement Through Research	Professor Judith Carrier has a passion for research and evidence synthesis, and throughout her career she has consistently gone above and beyond her role to positively impact nursing knowledge and enhance patient care.	Judith's career has spanned critical care and practice nursing. In 2001, she moved into academia and developed a programme for Practice Nurses in Gwent, leading BSc Community programmes in Cardiff and Oman, she became the Professional Head Primary

Award 2023, runner up	Judith has shared her knowledge of evidence synthesis and implementation by teaching hundreds of students and mentoring staff. She has also passed on her understanding of primary research through PhD supervision which has led to further service improvement.	Care/ Community Nursing and Director of Postgraduate Provision at Cardiff University. Judith was Director of the Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care (WCEBC) from 2010-2021, and the impact of its work in that period has been wide-ranging, including feeding into Welsh Government policy. She is currently Professor of Nursing, and Co-Deputy Director Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care at Cardiff University
Dr Ricky Hellyar Innovation and Digitalisation in Nursing Award 2021, winner	Ricky a Cardiff University lecturer in Adult Nursing, created the podcast series 'Behind the Health Statistic', which has grown an international following. Initially developed as an educational tool for pre-registration nurses, the podcasts evolved to become an alternative source of learning to books and other digital media.	Ricky is an Alumnus of Cardiff University and current staff member, having completed his MSc in Critical Care and his PhD (from 2012 – 2015) at the University. Ricky is currently a Senior Lecturer in Adult Nursing at Cardiff University. He has a breadth of experience in undergraduate nursing module development and has made significant contributions to Cardiff Nursing Futures and curriculum development. He is committed to positively contributing towards developing nurse education and its success at Cardiff University.
Amanda Holland and Lorraine Joomun, Nurse Education Award (joint nomination) 2021, runner up	At the time of the awards, Amanda was the SCPHN Programme Manager and Lecturer in Primary Care and Public Health at Cardiff University. Amanda has a background in health visiting and community nursing. She is passionate about raising the profile of health visiting and influencing policy to improve outcomes for babies, children and families.	Amanda is a Cardiff University Alumnus, having completed her nursing degree (2005-2008) and going on to complete post-graduate studies at the university, in addition to being a former staff member – Amanda was a Lecturer/ senior lecturer at Cardiff University, in primary care/public health nursing from 2015 to 2023, specialising in Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) Health Visiting. SCPHN programme manager. Senior Fellow Advanced HE. During 2020-2021, using a creative approach, they (Amanda and joint nominee Lorraine Joomun) adapted the SCPHN programme for online learning with a combination of tools and teaching resources.
Dr Victoria Shepherd, Supporting Improvement Through Research Award 2019, runner up	A NIHR Doctoral Research Fellow, Victoria has established a programme of research with practical application, with groups whose voices previously had not been heard. This includes people living with dementia, older people in care home settings and others who lack mental capacity.	Victoria is a Principal Research Fellow and registered nurse based in the Centre for Trials Research at Cardiff University. Her special interest in improving the inclusion of under-served populations with a particular focus on populations and settings where informed consent can be challenging. Victoria leads a programme of methodological research exploring the ethical, legal and practical issues around research involving adults who lack capacity consent and the development of complex interventions to address the barriers to inclusion.
Dr Aled Jones Research Award 2018, winner	With a background in mental health and adult nursing, as a Reader in Patient Safety and Healthcare Quality at Cardiff University, Aled led an innovative, policy-relevant, research programme which was improving nursing practice and health care in Wales, the UK and internationally.	During his time at Cardiff University Aled engaged in research-led teaching and led the Optimising Service Delivery and Organisation Research Theme. This brought together researchers at different career stages who conduct studies improving health care services and practice

Michelle Moseley, Safeguarding Award 2018, winner	Michelle's expertise sits within post-graduate education, health visiting and safeguarding. Michelle developed health board policy based on the recommendations from her MSc in Advanced Nursing Practice (Safeguarding Children and Young People), around health visitors recording of domestic abuse incidents.	Michelle is a Cardiff Alumnus, having completed most of her post-registration education at Cardiff in various iterations of the Nursing and Midwifery Schools. Michelle worked at the university as a lecturer from 2013–2020, leading the SCPHN programme. Michelle has recently been awarded her PhD, completed at Cardiff University, exploring the supportive nature of safeguarding supervision for health visitors taking an ethnographic stance. This has supported the development of the most recent All Wales safeguarding supervision guidance.
Dr Nicola Evans, Research Award 2017, winner	Nicola is recognised internationally as a research leader, teacher and practitioner in children and young people's mental health. Her excellence in this field is evidenced by her international publications, competitively secured funding and her growing national and international collaborations.	Nicola is a longstanding member of staff, and currently Director of Research at Cardiff University, where she is also a Reader in Mental Health Nursing. Nicola completed her Doctorate at Cardiff University in 2014. She currently teaches both undergraduate and postgraduate students at Cardiff University and leads a professional doctorate module.
Dr Sally Anstey, Nurse Education Award 2016, runner up	Sally is a Reader in Adult Nursing. Sally has dedicated her academic career to the pursuit of educational and research excellence covering a diverse range of nursing themes and matters.	Sally is currently a Reader in Adult Nursing, and Research Theme Lead: Optimising wellbeing and management in health and disease, working at Cardiff University since 2006. She is a Registered Adult Nurse and teaches across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes specifically cancer, genetics, palliative and end of life care, research and ethics.
Dr Ben Hannigan, Research Award 2015, winner	Ben, currently a Professor of Mental Health Nursing, has successfully developed a sustained body of research into mental health nursing, with a strong emphasis on including the views of service users from the outset. He has been involved in generating over one million pounds of competitive research funding. Ben has also advanced the profile of mental health nursing as an evidence-based discipline through his contribution to the group, Mental Health Academics UK.	Ben is a longstanding member of staff in, and a PhD alumnus of, Cardiff University. Ben completed his doctorate in 2006 which examined the organisation of community mental health care and the division of work. Since then, Ben has gone on to become a Professor of Mental Health Nursing in the School of Healthcare Sciences, and to lead and contribute to a series of externally funded research projects in mental health systems and services. Ben combines researching mental health systems and services with teaching across all academic levels, and over the years has maintained a steady flow of publications.
Lisa Cordory, Innovation Award 2015, winner	Lisa is a specialist Nurse in emotional wellbeing and Children's Rights lead for the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. Lisa has been responsible for the set up and continuation of the award-winning Youth Health Board which embeds a Children's Rights approach and youth voice across Wales.	As registered nurse and midwife Lisa went on to achieve a Professional Doctorate in Advanced Healthcare from 2016 to 2022 at Cardiff University, contributing to nurse education as an expert guest lecturer.
Ruth Cann 2013, Overall winner	The work-based project Ruth carried out as part of her MSc dissertation Helped Ruth to stand out and go on to win RCN Nurse of the Year in 2013.	Ruth completed her MSc in Advanced Practice on chronic conditions in 2014 at Cardiff University. All the support and opportunities provided by Cardiff University helped Ruth to achieve her goal of becoming a Consultant Nurse for Older Vulnerable Adults caring for Older People in the Cardiff and Vale region.