Show of hands: a hi-tech scheme to monitor the working hours of staff members, which works by scanning their hands as they start and finish their shifts, has divided opinion among nurses. In the scheme, staff clock in and out by placing their hand next to a sensor that records the size and shape of their fingers and palms. Some nurses at St George’s Healthcare NHS Trust in London and University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, which are running trials of the system, claim it is a ‘Big Brother’ style attempt to clamp down on employees, but others accept that it will save money. A spokesman for St George’s argues that the scheme will cut the trust’s bill for temporary payroll staff by avoiding disputes over the number of hours they had worked. If rolled out, says the trust, the hand sensor system would cost £500,000 but could save £2 million. The trust’s RCN office has backed the scheme.

Nurses are being urged to play their part in helping the NHS tackle global warming.

Staff can help the NHS to cut energy consumption by 20 per cent to below 1990 levels by 2010, according to a report by the NHS Confederation. The report includes some key questions that staff or local union representatives can ask employers to assess their climate change strategies. It also suggests some simple environmentally friendly strategies for trusts to adopt, including the reduction of food waste, and the segregation of domestic and clinical waste.

Nurses at Humber Mental Health Teaching NHS Trust had first hand experience of the potentially devastating effects of environmental change when their area was recently flooded. ‘Everyone has a part to play in saving the earth and using resources as efficiently as possible,’ said director of nursing Angie Mason. ‘It is important we get that message across to nurses.’

The trust launched an energy conservation campaign in February, which aims to reduce energy costs by £50,000 a year by encouraging staff to turn off lights, computers and equipment, turn down heaters, and close windows and doors properly. Meanwhile, Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has made significant financial savings by encouraging staff to recycle or reuse paper, furniture and clinical waste.

Assistant director of nursing Bev Geary said: ‘The difference now is that nurses feel that they are making a personal contribution to the hospital’s carbon footprint.’

Environmental damage presents such a challenge to the health service that the NHS Confederation has urged the government to include a health expert in its proposed committee on climate change.

Success of plans to increase productivity depend on staff involvement, finds survey

Efforts to boost productivity in hospital wards will fail unless acute nurses and other key staff are involved from the beginning, suggests an RCN policy briefing.

The document, Productivity and the Nursing Workforce, says that senior nurses should focus on increasing work rates by releasing staff from inappropriate or wasteful activities.

But it adds that any reduction in staff time should be reinvested elsewhere into improving care.

The report points out that improvements are more likely to occur where there is strong clinical leadership, and where there is feedback of information to staff, commissioners and patients.

The document predicts that senior nurses will increasingly have to measure nursing productivity in terms of quality and health outcomes rather than of nursing numbers and patient throughput.

A full version of the document is available at www.rcn.org.uk

Health bosses labelled ‘incompetent’

More than half of health sector workers believe their bosses are poor decision makers, according to a new survey.

A total of 64 per cent of employees said incompetence and lack of confidence were contributory factors to indecision. However, 73 per cent of health bosses said that managers were good decision makers.

Investors in People, the organisation that works with companies to improve performance, commissioned YouGov to conduct the survey. Employees said bad management reduced productivity and damaged morale.