

Future Congress

– the conversation continues!

“Last year in Bournemouth, we started our big discussion about what Congress will look like in the future.

Delegates told us what they thought and put forward many interesting and useful ideas. We then put their views and ideas into a consultation document which we sent out to branches, boards and forums so that the conversation could carry on.

We had great interest in the consultation, receiving 76 responses from membership groups and individuals representing, between them, the majority of RCN members. We have included examples of the feedback in this report at the end of each section.

This report explains what happened next and how we are taking forward your views and ideas. We also said we would bring back proposals for you to vote on at Congress this year.

Therefore, I invite you to a special session on Wednesday afternoon where we will ask you to support the direction of travel as outlined in this document.

Don't forget though, this isn't the end of the story. RCN Council is always happy to hear what you think and take on board new ideas and fresh thinking. We'll keep you posted too on developments as they happen.”

Sandra James
Chair of Council



Continuing the discussion...

1. What you told us

Congress 2010 sparked discussion on a number of themes – and we wanted to know more about them. Consequently, you told us what you thought about:

- the venue and timing
- attendance and diversity
- how the agenda is put together
- the debates themselves
- voting and funding
- speakers
- fringe events and themed days
- the exhibition and social events.

You came up with lots of ideas but, most significantly, it was clear that there is no demand for any major fundamental change! However, there were a good number of suggestions that can be taken forward.



Consultation timeline

28 April 2010

Future Congress launched at Congress with a discussion in the main hall.

June 2010

Comments from Congress put into a consultation document.

July – Sept 2010

Branches, boards, forums and individual members gave their feedback.

2. What happened next

RCN Council convened a special sub-group to look at all the responses and to talk through the various thoughts, opinions and ideas. The members of the group were:

- Chair: Sandra James, RCN Chair of Council
- Stacey Hunter, RCN Council
- Michael Brown, RCN Council
- Yvonne Needham, Forum Chair of Chairs
- Pauline Pearsall, UK Learning Reps 'Committee, representing joint reps' committees
- Rod Thomson, RCN Chair of Congress
- Stuart McKenzie, RCN Vice Chair of Congress
- Dominic Walsh, RCN Congress Agenda Committee.

The group met three times to discuss the consultation feedback and then put together a number of recommendations to RCN Council at its November meeting.

Some of the recommendations were actions that could be implemented right away. In fact, you may have noticed some changes already to this year's Congress. Others will involve some further work and development.

The group also considered the RCN's ongoing Legal and Governance Review and decided that some of the recommendations, such as the work on the Congress constitution, needed to sit within that piece of work and be incorporated into the development of the RCN's new Regulations.

The new Regulations are the "3rd tier" of constitutional documentation that we said we would develop following the adoption of the new revised charter and standing orders.

The Regulations are the vehicle by which the Royal Charter and Standing Orders are implemented, and will contain the detail of many of our processes. They will replace the current RCN Rules. The Regulations will be developed on an incremental basis, consulted on as appropriate and approved by Council as they are completed.

3. Your feedback and next steps in more detail

3.1 Venue and timing

Congress moves around each year to make it accessible for members from different parts of the UK, but also to take advantage of good hire rates from venue providers.

Feedback from members during the consultation suggested that some members (approximately 20% of those who responded) favoured central locations with good access from all parts of the UK. The Council sub-group agreed that would be ideal but practical considerations mean that choice of venue also has to be governed by factors such as cost, size and availability.

What matters most importantly, however, is that decisions over venue choice are clearly communicated and explained to members. Consequently, you will see in your Congress brochure and on the website this year information about why Liverpool was chosen for 2011.

Fifty seven per cent of the membership groups who responded expressed a preference for holding the AGM and Congress at the same time. Likewise 77.73% of members voting at the AGM in 2010 were also in favour of it. More work is now being done on the feasibility of holding them together. There are a number of logistical and practical matters to consider in more detail – not least of which are the dates of the RCN’s financial year which must be in line with the AGM.

Many members also thought it would be better to start Congress on the Saturday evening in order to avoid Sunday travel. We are now looking into this for next year.

P.S Don’t forget to tell us what you think about Liverpool as a venue in your feedback at the end of Congress!

Some of your thoughts...

“Where at all possible Congress should be held in as many locations across England and the other three countries of the UK.”

“The venues at Bournemouth and Harrogate are both excellent. Alternative venues need to have the same level of facilities and easy access to public transport.”

3.2 Attendance and diversity

A number of members commented about the diversity of Congress being one of its strong points. However, it was suggested that more could be done in relation to equality impact assessments during Congress planning and this will be taken forward.

There was also a strong feeling that more needed to be done to encourage new members to attend.

The Council sub-group agreed, and suggested that the current model of funding and voting does not do enough to encourage members who have not previously been to Congress.

Consequently, the group has referred this question to be considered as part of the wider Legal and Governance Review as it is part and parcel of discussions about the role and purpose of branches and boards.



Sept – Nov 2010

Results of the consultation considered by the Future Congress sub-group, who then made recommendations.

25 November 2010

Council approve the Future Congress sub-group’s plan.

13 April 2011

You are here! Congress votes on whether to support the direction of travel.



1989

Council agreed some fundamental principles, however, in relation to funding and voting. There should be:

- a clear separation of funding and voting
- more local governance around funding and voting decisions
- a simpler and more transparent way for members to be represented at Congress.

These principles will be used to underpin the discussions in the Legal and Governance review.

Some of your thoughts...

“Perhaps get more members involved by placing more emphasis on the training and professional development element.”

“Not an issue of who can attend, but who does attend. The tension usually arises at a local/entity level when the allocation of places is done. It is often the same people insisting they go and not allowing others to have places.”

“More needs to be done to encourage and facilitate non-voting RCN members to attend.”

“... voting allocation should be in line with membership numbers.”

“... need to seriously consider moving away from branch and forum representation.”

“I’m not sure what can be done about the funds in future, but it is likely that the ‘usual suspects’ will attend Congress and not the masses who want to go.”

“We believe that Congress through the work of the Agenda Committee and Council has addressed the issue of diversity, which we believe is an example to other organisations.”



3.3 The agenda

Members' views concurred with those of Council and the Agenda Committee that more support is needed to ensure submitted agenda items encourage the best possible debate and that more controversial discussion would be welcomed. There was also a view that the process of submitting items could be improved and that members would welcome more feedback on items that were not selected.

Council agreed that the process for submitting Congress agenda items and producing background information is reviewed to ensure greater transparency and member ownership and to ensure the agenda is more relevant, provides inspiration for debates, and is representative of all four countries of the UK.

Members were given more guidance this year and additional information placed on the website to help with the drafting of agenda items. In addition, members of the Agenda Committee toured the country attending board meetings and other events to encourage and support members to submit agenda items.

More tailored feedback has been given to members who submitted items this year. In addition, the Agenda Committee took a more structured approach during their selection and is working towards developing a more formal matrix of criteria against which to make decisions and report back to members.

Over 140 items were submitted this year – an increase of around 27% from last year. Items were submitted from membership entities all over the UK and represented a broad range of interests.

More is also being done to encourage members to start discussing agenda items before they even get to Congress – for example, this year we are sending out an eBulletin in advance of the event with more information about the agenda items.

What do you think of the agenda this year? Please let us know if the changes we have made this year are on the right track and if there is more we can do. Continue to feedback your thoughts in the Congress 2011 evaluation.

Some of your thoughts...

"... encourage members to debate online before Congress itself."

"Agenda should be determined on the basis of its fit with our strategic plan."

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3.4 Fringe events

Fringe events drew a number of comments from members – around logistical matters and the need to ensure that we have a strong programme of professional events to add value to members’ continuous professional development.

The sub-group considered the feedback and felt strongly that it was important to:

- have more robust and timely processes around selecting and accrediting fringe events
- streamline and increase the quality of fringe events and clearly delineate between professional and networking type events
- develop the content of the fringe more strategically and use fringe events to engage with other health and social care professions and patient groups
- develop clear links between the agenda and the fringe programme.

We have already started to put some of this into place. This year we undertook a more strategic process when selecting events and ensured there are more developed programmes and considered content.

We have also been looking at the logistics. Our Liverpool venue is more compact and we are able to hold many of the fringe events in the conference centre itself – saving you valuable time in travelling to and from the main auditorium.

We see improvements to the fringe as an iterative process but hope you can already start to benefit professionally and educationally from our new approach.

Some of your thoughts...

“Congress needs to be made more relevant to members and it cannot do this without addressing some of the contentious critical issues that face nurses in the workplace.”

“A robust equality impact assessment must be carried out to ensure that the agenda, as far as is practically possible, covers the key issues for nurses and nursing, but also gives cognisance to the diversity of nursing practice, of the RCN membership and the RCN as a UK organisation with members in the four countries of the UK.”

“Perhaps get more members involved by placing more emphasis on the training and professional development element, i.e. more educational seminars on CV writing, for example, interview skills, management skills etc.”

3.5 Speakers and debates

New technology and new processes were considered to be vital to the development of Congress in the future – especially as a means of getting more members engaged and involved. At its November 2010 meeting Council agreed to a recommendation to look further into this and to take forward exploratory work into the potential of new technology.

There was also some feeling that more should be done to encourage new speakers in debates and that the RCN website could be developed to encourage and stimulate interest in the issues beforehand. Again, our new Congress eBulletin is a step towards this and has contained links and information about the agenda and fringe themes.

The sub-group and Council also felt it important to reinforce the existing powers of the Chair to manage the meeting.

A few members felt that there had been too many external speakers at Congress in the last few years and views were expressed that more attention should be paid to inviting speakers from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This is something that Council and the Agenda Committee will review year on year depending on the current political context.

Some of your thoughts...

“Celebrating diversity is currently done well at Congress with well-attended events. Perhaps there could be more practical sessions on, for example, tackling racism in the workplace etc. to encourage member involvement.”

“Ordinary members sharing best practice should be encouraged as well as those who have done something ground-breaking.”

“Have speakers from other disciplines within the health arena to talk about what they are doing and what lessons can be learned.”

“It was my first time at Congress and I felt that there were too many of the same respondents. I wanted to hear the opinions of others.”

“Perhaps there could be a fringe about public speaking, or a short film shown each morning with tips on how to address Congress.”

“Introduce a system to automatically reduce each speaker’s time when the queue reaches a certain length to allow more speakers a chance.”

“Condensing separate political debates into a single session, where each person could have a couple of minutes each to state their case.”

2010



3.6 Finally

Networking and social events are a vitally important part of Congress as we all need space and time to build relationships and develop our professional networks – as well as celebrate being part of the RCN family.

We are continuing to develop our Sunday night awards ceremony and to prioritise the important achievements of our members and others who have contributed significantly to nursing and to patient care. In the future we'll be looking more widely about how we do this across the organisation and ensuring that our members are fully recognised and rewarded.



4. What do you think?

At the launch of our Future Congress consultation we said we would bring back this report to Congress 2011 for you to consider and to vote on.

Consequently, at the session on Wednesday afternoon you will be asked to vote whether or not you are content with the direction of travel for RCN Congress, as outlined in this document.

Please come along and let us have your thoughts – it is so important to have your say.

You can also read the full report on the consultation, which includes a list of everyone who responded, at www.rcn.org.uk/futurecongress



The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

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RCN Direct **0345 772 6100**

RCN Online www.rcn.org.uk