

Future Congress

– join our big discussion!

“What will Congress look like in two years, 10 years, 20 years and even 100 years time?”

That’s what we’d like RCN members to consider in our Future Congress discussion. Let your imagination flow, talk to fellow members and colleagues and tell us what you think Congress should be about in the years to come.

The first steps in our big discussion took place in April this year at Congress in Bournemouth at a special session on the Wednesday afternoon. This document incorporates the feedback and ideas from that day and is designed to help you get thinking!”

Sandra James
Chair of Council



For more than 90 years and in many forms, the annual Congress of the Royal College of Nursing has reflected through its themes and debates the major issues of nursing: the struggle to achieve professional status, changing gender relations, the radicalisation of nurses from the 1960s, the growing political influence of the RCN, and of course the quality of patient care.

This briefing paper will take you through Congress past, Congress present, and will ask you what you think Congress in the future should look like. RCN Council is using it to host discussions with members about the future shape of RCN Congress, following a main hall session at Congress 2010 in which delegates shared their ideas (you can watch this online at www.rcn.org.uk/congressarchive).

The issue will be debated by boards, branches, forum committees, by the representative committees and other membership and staff groups. We'll also be giving individual members the opportunity to feed in via the RCN website. Council will listen to members' views with an open mind, and will consider how best to make any changes. This all takes place within the context of the RCN's Legal and Governance Review.

Congress present

Congress has changed a lot over the years, but remains at the heart of the nursing calendar. Here is an outline of how Congress currently works with questions for you. This information should form the basis of your discussion on how Congress might change. Comments and ideas from the Future Congress session at Congress 2010 in Bournemouth have been included to give you some ideas.

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. The large size of the exhibition means that Congress is limited to the small number of venues big enough to host it. Since 1979, when Congress was held in Guernsey, the meeting has been held in Harrogate 15 times and Bournemouth 10 times, Glasgow once, and Blackpool and Brighton twice.

Congress is held in April or May over five days, Sunday to Thursday. The RCN's AGM is held in October each year.

Congress past

1916

The RCN is founded, under the title of the College of Nursing Ltd.

1924

First AGM held in June, together with a public conference entitled *What is an Ideal Nursing Service?*

1929

First Ordinary General Meeting of the College of Nursing (incorporated by Royal Charter) held.

1939

Title 'Royal' granted to the College of Nursing.

Some thoughts from Congress 2010:

- “How can we address Sunday travel issues – especially from rural communities?”
- “Could Congress last until the Friday lunchtime?”
- “Should we hold the AGM and Congress together – or do they each need their own slot in the year?”
- “Would it be better to change the timing of Congress to align it with the business cycle?”
- “Can we consider more venues in different parts of the country – what about the Isle of Man?”

Key questions for your discussion:

- Is Congress value for money?
- Should the event look and feel different?
- Should we re-join Congress and the AGM?
- How can we ensure Congress is accessible to everyone?
- Is Congress the right length and held at the right time?

2. Who can attend?

All RCN members can attend Congress for free, and thousands do. In addition, all voting members can claim their travel and accommodation within the expenses policy.

Key questions for your discussion:

- How (or should) we get more members involved?
- How can we increase and celebrate diversity throughout Congress?

3. Putting the Congress agenda together

Six elected representatives make up the Congress Agenda Committee, the group responsible for running and chairing Congress, and for selecting the items (matters for discussion and resolutions) to be debated. This includes last minute suggestions submitted for emergency debates, allowing very current and often crucial debates to make it onto the Congress agenda.

Agenda items are submitted by RCN members through the submitting entities – the Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and English Boards and branches, RCN Forums, the Association of Nursing Students (ANS), the UK committees of learning representatives, safety representatives and stewards and RCN Council.

The Agenda Committee considers potential items for inclusion at Congress “blind” – it has no idea who submitted them. An item is chosen purely on its merit: is it a hot topic, will it excite debate, or will it contribute to the future of nursing or the RCN as an organisation?

This anonymised selection of items by the Agenda Committee has sometimes meant an uneven spread of items submitted by different entities – there is no “quota” of items from each country or submitting entity type. A high proportion of total suggested items come from English boards/branches and from forums, simply because these contain the most members, who submit the most ideas.

For example, in 2007, 49 per cent of submissions were from English boards/branches – these generated 37 per cent of all the items actually debated at Congress.

1965



1943

RCN AGM now an early summer fixture on nursing calendar and runs over five days.

1966

The RCN celebrates its Golden Jubilee. 800 guests attend a reception in the presence of RCN Patron HM The Queen Mother.

1967

The RCN Representative Body (RRB) established as new debating forum. First meeting held with 287 voting members.

1968

The RRB meeting and AGM held together. Telegrams sent to Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Minister of Health, starting the tradition.

1969

The first conference-style meeting held with exhibition, social activities and expert speakers to attract a new audience.

1971

The AGM is held separately to the conference-style meeting.

1973

Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Health under Ted Heath, speaks. The professional theme is *Caring for an Ageing Population*.

1977

The RCN becomes a professional trade union.



1989

That year, Welsh entities submitted four per cent of suggestions, but seven per cent of those finally debated at that Congress came from Wales.

Some thoughts from Congress 2010:

- “How can we get more resolutions?”
- “Can we have more feedback on agenda items that don’t make it onto the agenda”
- “Can we provide more training and support to get more agenda items submitted?”
- “Can we have fewer restrictions on how and who can submit agenda items?”
- “Ask members to vote on selection of resolutions by using technology?”
- “How do we get more controversial issues and have a real debate?”
- “Should we put the agenda items submission dates back to allow more time?”
- “How about getting rid of matters for discussion?”
- “What should the role of the Agenda Committee be? And how should they be elected?”
- “Should it stay a UK event – should it be federated?”

Key questions for your discussion:

- What is the best way of choosing what goes on the agenda?
- Who should choose which items are included?
- Should items be selected on the basis of quality or should we ensure an even spread across all groups?

4. Debating the issues

At the moment debates for resolutions or matters of discussion follow the same format: the proposer is allocated five minutes and all subsequent speakers are allocated two minutes. The proposer is then given two minutes at the end of the debate for a right of reply. Procedural item or point of order cards can be used throughout the debate. All delegates are eligible to speak in a debate, and spaces in the speaking queue are allocated on a first-come-first-served basis using a handset.

Some thoughts from Congress 2010:

- “How can we manage the speaking queue – or should we manage it?”
- “Should we bring back “for” and “against” queues?”
- “How can we be more inclusive of non-voting members?”
- “Should we get rid of referrals to Council, and abstentions?”

Key questions for your discussion:

- Can we improve the flow of debate?

1987

RCN Congress replaces RRB as the new representative body.

1989

The new-look Congress held in Glasgow. Reflecting concerns about HIV/AIDs, condoms are a giveaway.

1993

The first John Goodlad Memorial Lecture is given by Chris Vellenoweth from the National Association of Health.

1994

RCN Award of Merit instituted.

1979

RCN members battle with fog to travel to Guernsey for their conference, where the theme is *Standards*.

1982

Kenneth Clarke, Secretary of State under Margaret Thatcher, speaks on the major NHS reorganisation.

1983

Reflecting the first year of the Pay Review Body, the conference theme is *Nursing and Politics*.

1984

The RCN scarlet and blue hands logo is introduced.

5. Voting and funding

Voting at Congress is carried out by members who have been nominated to represent their branch, forum or committee. Voting members must be in the hall during a debate to vote.

Congress delegate places for voting members and the question of how we fund members to attend is currently being looked at as part of the RCN's Legal and Governance Review. It is expected that Council will bring proposals for voting and funding to Congress in 2011. Your suggestions will inform this work.

Some thoughts from Congress 2010:

- "What about one member one vote?"
- "How can we get a fair and representative system?"
- "Can we clarify who can vote, for example retired members?"
- "How can we use new technology more to include more views from members?"
- "What about online voting?"
- "But how can we include the people who can't use new technology?"
- "Should we transfer voting places if people can't attend or use postal votes?"
- "Could we make the voting details open to public scrutiny?"

Key questions for your discussion:

- Who should voting members be?
- Who should be funded to attend Congress?
- How can we ensure all voting members attend and vote?
- Could the voting system be improved by new technology?

6. Speakers

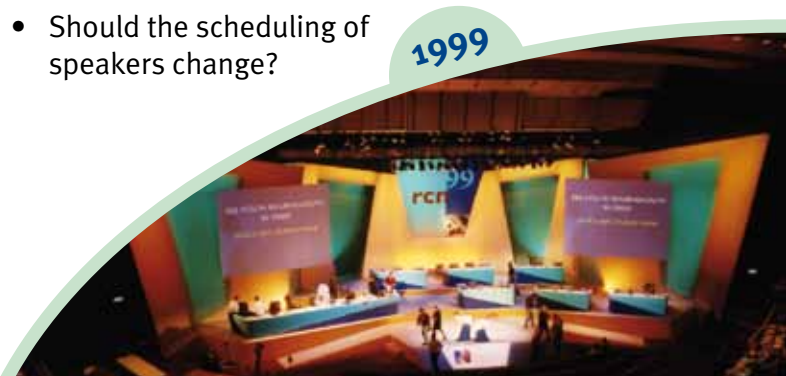
In recent years, Congress has hosted an exciting and inspiring range of speakers, including major political figures and those with touching personal experiences. Speakers currently address the Congress in the main auditorium.

Some thoughts from Congress 2010:

- "Are there too many speakers – do we need more debating sessions?"
- "Should the politicians speak at fringe meetings rather than as part of the main agenda?"
- "Should we have politicians other than those from Westminster?"

Key questions for your discussion:

- What sort of people do you want to address Congress?
- Should the scheduling of speakers change?



1995

Electronic voting system introduced.

1997

RCN forums have dedicated space in the exhibition and reports of debates faxed to RCN offices for first time.

1998

CCTV is used for first time – delegates get used to their faces appearing on a huge screen as they address the meeting.

1999

Electronic voting and queuing introduced. New Congress Constitution confirmed. Mo Mowlam addresses Congress.

2000

Congress debate leads to an AGM all-member vote later in the year in favour of widening the membership to include HCAs and cadets.

2001

A Sunday opening ceremony held for first time. The Congress agenda goes online.

2002

Congress is free to delegates for first time. RCN Congress *Daily Bulletin* is launched.

2003

Congress is made available via webstream and videotapes of debates go on sale.



7. Themed days

Finding ways to highlight particular areas of work has been a constant theme throughout the history of Congress. In the past this has included dedicating days to different clinical specialisms and what were referred to as “professional issues”.

Students have been coming on a particular day for some years and they continue to make perceptive contributions to debate. In 2009 the first dedicated day for health care assistants brought Congress valuable insights and recruited many new members.

Some thoughts from Congress 2010:

- “Should we re-introduce separate days for professional and trade union issues as we had in the past?”

Key questions for your discussion:

- Would you like more themed days? If so, what ones?
- Should we separate the professional and trade union topics?

8. More thoughts

We’d also like you to think about the following:

The exhibition

The exhibition first appeared with the new-look conference meeting in 1969. Today it provides a showcase where visitors can find information on the latest innovations in nursing care and policy, career options and services for members. Most Congress attendees visit the exhibition and it also attracts lots of visitors who do not go on to attend Congress itself.

The fringe programme

The fringe programme has been running for many years and has covered every aspect of nursing from pay and pensions to clinical care, and even subjects such as pets in hospitals. Congress also includes a sponsored seminar programme. All aspects of Congress are accredited and can be put towards CPD.

The social side of Congress

It is impossible to put a financial value on the social side of Congress. Delegates can take the opportunity to spend time networking and meeting up with colleagues and fellow branch and forum members, and discos and comedy nights are popular. How can we ensure that events are inclusive and that there is something for everyone?

The web

The Congress section of our website has developed rapidly, and we now stream live video from all debates and speakers in the auditorium. These videos are available to watch back afterwards as well. Tens of thousands of people have kept up with Congress remotely in this way.

2008

Dr Peter Carter holds first question-and-answer session. Fit for Congress walks and classes take place.

2009

Gordon Brown is the first current Prime Minister to address Congress. Health Care Assistants’ Day introduced

2010

Twitter and Facebook reporting starts, daily Congress eBulletins published and daily films posted on YouTube.

2004

Professor Elizabeth Anionwu delivers the inaugural Mary Seacole Lecture.

2005

Congress goes smoke-free. A record number of members attend, with 500 watching debates online.

2006

Fellowships and Awards of Merit presented together. Patricia Hewitt receives unfriendly reception due to NHS job losses.

2007

Congress rejects below-inflation pay awards for nurses, starting a high-profile campaign leading to a revised pay offer.

More information to help your discussion

Costs of Congress

| Year | Actual Costs | Actual income (exhibition and sponsorship) | Net Costs | Net costs per day (Sun-Thu) |
|------|--------------|--|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 2005 | £1,154,137 | £591,722 | £562,415 | £112,483 |
| 2006 | £1,201,275 | £620,568 | £580,707 | £116,141 |
| 2007 | £1,120,822 | £559,233 | £561,589 | £112,317 |
| 2008 | £1,093,030 | £561,325 | £531,705 | £106,341 |
| 2009 | £1,145,144 | £550,127 | £595,017 | £119,003 |

Numbers attending Congress

| Year | Voting members | Non-voting members | Others* | Total |
|------|----------------|--------------------|---------|-------|
| 2005 | 695 | 896 | 1,496 | 3,086 |
| 2006 | 680 | 789 | 2,091 | 3,560 |
| 2007 | 768 | 1,126 | 3,439 | 5,333 |
| 2008 | 744 | 1,163 | 2,227 | 4,134 |
| 2009 | 670 | 1,411 | 3,869 | 5,950 |

*includes exhibition visitors, exhibitors, students, HCAs, Council and staff

What do other organisations do?

All the RCN's peers hold an annual event, although few organisations host one as large as RCN Congress or use the web as a broadcasting medium to include more members remotely.

The Royal College of Nursing Australia holds a three-day accredited Annual Conference, consisting of panel forums, concurrent sessions and keynote speakers, as well as an exhibition. The American Nurses' Association holds a House of Delegates attracting 600 delegates which runs every two years over four days. The event debates resolutions on a variety of issues.

The BMA has an Annual Representative Meeting over four days, which includes its AGM and motions for debate. The NHS Confederation has an Annual Conference and Exhibition, over three days; 1,800 delegates attended in 2009, and plenary sessions were broadcast live online on Second Life. The Royal College of Physicians has a one day College Day which includes the AGM of Fellows and presidential elections. The Royal College of Midwives has an annual one-day event, which replaces a formal AGM.

UNISON has a National Delegate Conference each year, with resolutions setting the agenda for its policy and a fringe programme and workshops. It also has an annual Health Conference, attended by just over 600 delegates in 2009.

The Police Federation and Fire Brigades' Union both hold annual three-day conferences which debate motions. The Trades Union Congress lasts for four days with motions and a fringe programme.

Congress future – tell us what you think

Now it's over to you. Gather your thoughts and visit

www.rcn.org.uk/futurecongress or complete the form enclosed by 17 September 2010 to let Council know what you think Congress should look like in the future.



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

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