

Terms of Reference: RCN Council

1. Name of Committee

1.1 RCN Council

2. Purpose

2.1 As per paragraph 7.1 of the RCN Royal Charter:

There shall be a Council of the College which shall have the general control and management of the administration of the College and may exercise all the powers vested in it by law.

The RCN is governed by two main bodies – the Privy Council, in respect of it being a Royal College, and the Trade Union Certification Officer, in respect of its trade union responsibilities.

2.2 The main purpose of the RCN Council is to act as a governing body and principal executive committee of the trade union, and provide strategic leadership, direction and oversight to the RCN. It is responsible for making major decisions, setting policies, discharging professional responsibilities for leading on the RCN Charter's objectives and ensuring the long-term success of the RCN, and wider RCN Group, for the benefit of its members, to which it is accountable.

2.3 The RCN Charter confers on RCN Council all the powers of the RCN except those exercisable only by the RCN members in a general meeting, at which the members exercise those powers afforded to them by the RCN Royal Charter and its Rules, and the Standing Orders.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Strategy & Leadership:

- a) Ensuring that the RCN has a clear vision, mission and strategy to achieve its objects.
- b) Ensuring that that the delivery of the Strategic Plan is on track and that the strategic framework is agile in its response to internal and external developments.
- c) Providing input into and approving the RCN Strategic plan, identifying priorities, and keeping under review the long-term development of the

organisation in the light of the political, economic and social environment in which it operates.

- d) Ensuring that advice and guidance is taken from expert staff and advisers to inform priorities, policy development and key strategic decisions.
- e) Engaging actively in strategic decision-making and policy decisions to implement the strategy.
- f) Ensuring that the RCN applies sound and proper principles, policies and procedures in relation to all areas of its work.
- g) Ensuring that the Nolan Committee's Seven Principles of Public Life as set out in the Schedule to the RCN Council, board and committee members – fit and proper persons criteria Regulation, inform all actions and decisions of RCN Council both individually and collectively.
- h) Ensuring that the RCN has a governance structure that is appropriate to an organisation of its size and complexity, and its objects, and that reflects the diversity of its stakeholders, including agreeing any changes to the overall legal and governance structures of the organisation, including the approval of setting up subsidiaries.
- i) Appointing the Chief Executive and General Secretary (as per item 12 of the Royal Charter), including their support, appraisal and remuneration.
- j) Delegating any of its powers and decisions, and their implementation and/or revocation, to any committee appointed in accordance with the *Rules* and the *Standing Orders*. This includes all financial matters. (Schedule 1, Rule 2.1 of the Royal Charter).
- k) Effectively discharging responsibilities in respect of duties to the wider RCN Group in line with agreed policies.
- l) Agreeing and delegating appropriate levels of responsibility and authority to the Chair of Council, Committees of RCN Council, Board members and the Chief Executive and General Secretary.
- m) Delegating the responsibility for the management of RCN staff to the Chief Executive & General Secretary (Schedule 1, Rule 4 of the *Royal Charter*) and operational delivery of the work of the College.
- n) Accountability as the Trade Union Executive & authorising Industrial Action (Standing Order 3.2).
- o) Agreeing the agenda for general meetings (including the AGM).

3.2. Risk & Assurance

- a) Seeking assurance that the internal control mechanisms in place to support risk, investment and financial management processes are in place and robustly monitored.
- b) Seeking assurance that the necessary management information systems exist to assess the organisation's performance and progress in meeting its objectives, including the evaluation of operational effectiveness and efficiency, compliance with laws and regulations and the reliability of management and financial information.
- c) Seeking assurance that the RCN and its activities meet performance and quality standards and improvement targets.
- d) Seeking assurance from the Executive Team that the information supplied to RCN Council is timely, accurate and up-to-date.
- e) Ensuring that there is full accountability for decisions and work that it delegates through, for example, receiving and monitoring reports from reporting committees.
- f) Ensuring that the RCN Council regularly reviews and evaluates the governance structure and biennially reviews its own performance.
- g) Ensuring that the RCN Group meets its statutory obligations while retaining its ethos and values.
- h) Ensuring that that the RCN Group complies with its legal and regulatory requirements.
- i) Ensuring there are timely and simple mechanisms to consult and engage with members, and other stakeholders, in order to seek and harness their views to inform key decisions.

3.3. Member Engagement

- a) Ensuring that the RCN provides advice, representation and expertise on nursing, health, and employment issues to its members.
- b) Ensuring all RCN Council members actively engage with members.
- c) Reporting on RCN Council's actions and decisions as required by law and in line with good practice – in, for example, the Annual Report and Financial Statements, at general meetings of the organisation and through reporting annually to the members at RCN Congress.
- d) Proposing changes to the *Royal Charter* or *Standing Orders* following consultation with the membership and other stakeholders where appropriate.
- e) Approving any changes in membership categories (Royal Charter, item 6).
- f) Approving Fellowships, Awards of Merit and any other such awards.
- g) Lending expertise to the organisation and providing access to others who can support and help the organisation.

3.4. Financial management

- a) Appointing (and, where necessary, revoking the appointment of) auditors (Schedule 1, Rule 5 of the RCN's Royal Charter).

- b) Approving the Strategic Plan, and the annual budget including any major capital projects.
- c) Acting as guardians of the organisation's assets, both tangible and intangible and ensure the financial stability of the organisation.
- d) Agreeing the long-term financial strategy, including maintaining a forward view of the organisation's finances, and approving the annual budget and major expenditure and transactions.
- e) Approval of the annual subscription rate to be put to the members in general meeting by RCN Council (Standing Order 6).
- f) Approval of significant spend in line with the Finance Regulations.

4. Reporting and accountability

4.1 Under Schedule 2.1 of the RCN Royal Charter, RCN Council has delegated various functions to committees and to staff respectively. The delegation to committees and staff is summarised in a Scheme of Delegation which is reviewed annually. The following Committees/Boards report directly to RCN Council.

Country and Regional Boards

- England Regional Boards
- Wales Board
- Northern Ireland Board
- Scotland Board

The Principal Committees

- RCN Professional Nursing Committee
- RCN Trade Union Committee

The Scrutiny Committees

- Group Audit Committee
- Finance and Investment Committee
- Group Remuneration Committee
- Governance Committee

The Advisory Committees

- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee
- International Committee

The Representative Committees of RCN Council

- Nursing Support Workers Committee
- Students Committee

The Functional Committees

- Agenda Committee (Congress)
- Awards Committee (Awards)

4.2 RCN Council may establish other committees/boards as the need arises.

4.3 Formal minutes of RCN Council meetings will be kept and approved at subsequent meetings of the RCN Council.

4.4 Key messages from RCN Council meetings will be disseminated to Country and Regional Boards, Committees of the RCN (where appropriate), and to the wider membership via the RCN website and other communications channels as appropriate.

5. Meetings and quorum

5.1 The RCN Council will meet at least four times a year. The dates of the meetings shall be agreed by RCN Council in the year preceding that in which the meetings are to be held.

5.2 A special meeting may be called by the Chair, the Vice-Chair (if the Chair is not available), the Chief Executive and General Secretary, or half of the voting members of RCN Council by giving notice in writing, or by email, to the Chair or Vice-Chair (if the Chair is not available).

5.3 Half of the members with voting rights plus two Executive Team RCN Council members shall constitute a quorum. No decisions may be made at a meeting that is not quorate. Those who do not hold voting rights are the Chair of Congress and any member who has taken a temporary leave of absence from RCN Council in line with RCN policy or who is subject to ongoing suspension from RCN Council.

5.4 In order to vote at a meeting, a member must be present either in-person or virtually.

5.5 In a meeting, in the case of an equality of votes, the Chair shall have a second or casting vote.

5.6 Where a resolution is sent in writing to RCN Council members for decision outside of a meeting, two thirds of members eligible to vote must agree the resolution for it to be passed (RCN Royal Charter 7.5).

5.7 Meetings of the RCN Council will be conducted as per the RCN Policy and Process for Running Meetings and as per Standing Orders 19.

6. Membership

6.1 The RCN Council shall comprise:

- One elected member each from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- One elected member each from each of the nine English regions: East Midlands, Eastern, London, North West, Northern, South East, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber.

- The elected President of the RCN (ex-officio)
 - The elected Deputy President of the RCN (ex-officio)
 - The Chair of RCN Congress (ex-officio) is a non-voting RCN Council member.
 - An elected Nursing Support Worker member.
 - An elected Student member
 - The Chief Executive and General Secretary is a non-voting RCN Council member
 - Up to 10 Executive Team members in a non-voting capacity (this includes the Chief Executive and General Secretary but must not include the Executive Team member with responsibility for governance).
- 6.2 The members of RCN Council are the governors of the RCN Group, which comprises the RCN, RCN Foundation and RCN HoldCo Ltd.
- 6.3 The members of RCN Council are the members of the Trade Union Executive.
- 6.4 The RCN Council, Board and Committee Members – Fit and Proper Persons Criteria Regulation provides further supplementary information to Schedule Rule 1 of the RCN Royal Charter, with regards to criteria to ensure individuals are fit and proper to undertake their role.
- 6.5 In instances where an elected RCN Council member requests to take a temporary period of absence, refer to Regulation for when an accredited representative or member elected or appointed to RCN Council, Board or a Committee requests to take a temporary period of absence.
7. Observers
- 7.1 The Chairs of the Trade Union Committee and Professional Nursing Committee, or in their absence their Vice-Chairs, will attend RCN Council meetings to provide regular updates on the work of the Trade Union Committee/Professional Nursing Committee and for any other item that the RCN Council deems appropriate.
- 7.2. Other observers may attend confidential and/or open sessions of meetings at the discretion of the Chair. Observers can speak and/or participate in the meeting only with the permission of, or at the request of, the Chair. They cannot vote.
- 7.2 Individuals attending in observer status for confidential meetings are provided papers at the discretion of the Chair.
- 7.3 Individuals attending in observer status for open meetings will receive those papers relating to the areas relevant to their observer role.

7.4 As a general rule, observers will not usually attend private or confidential sessions of RCN Council.

8. Election to the RCN Council

8.1 Elections to the RCN Council will be conducted in accordance with the Standing Orders 7 to 11 and the RCN Elections and Appointment Policy and Processes document.

8.2 One half of the members elected to RCN Council, not including the ex-officio positions, shall retire every two years.

9. Terms of office for Elected Members

9.1 Terms of office will be for four years, except for the place allocated to the Student member which shall be two years (as per the provisions of Standing Order 9) and for casual vacancies which will be to the end of the vacant term.

9.2 Any person serving as a RCN Council member ex-officio shall continue in that position as long as they occupy the relevant office. Once they no longer occupy the relevant office, they shall vacate their place on the RCN Council which shall be filled by his or her successor in office.

9.3 Further information regarding terms of office for RCN Council members are as prescribed in the RCN Office Holder Eligibility Regulations.

9.4 Further information regarding eligibility to RCN Council roles can be found in the RCN Elections and Appointments Policy and Processes and the eligibility criteria set out in the individual election procedures.

10. Mid-Term (casual) vacancies for Elected Members

10.1 A casual vacancy on the RCN Council shall be filled in accordance with Standing Order 11.

10.2 Further information is provided in the RCN Elections and Appointments Policy and Processes document.

11. Officers of the RCN Council

11.1 In accordance with Standing Orders 20 & 21, the Chair, Vice-Chair and Honorary Treasurer shall be elected every two years by the members of the RCN Council from amongst the members of the RCN Council, with the exception of the President, Deputy President, Chair of Congress, Student

member and Nursing Support Worker member who are not eligible to stand.

- 11.2 The terms of office for these officers shall each be for two years.
 - 11.3 The Chair and Vice-Chair shall each be eligible for re-election for one further term and any individual who has served two terms as Chair or Vice-Chair may not stand for any further terms in that role.
 - 11.4 Any person standing for the role of Vice-Chair of Council must not have previously served as Chair of Council (RCN Elections and Appointments Policy and Processes document).
 - 11.5 For the Honorary Treasurer role, the RCN Office Holder Eligibility Regulations shall apply in respect of serving more than one term.
 - 11.6 No officer may simultaneously hold the office of President or Deputy President (Standing Order 12.6).
 - 11.7 The manner and timescales for the election of officers will be determined by RCN Council.
12. Staff support, advice and guidance
- 12.1 Elected RCN Council members and staff will work together positively and constructively, in line with the RCN Respect Charter, to deliver the purposes of the RCN Council and within the RCN Governance Operating Framework.
 - 12.2 The Executive Director of Governance will ensure that Secretariat support is provided by the Governance Directorate.
 - 12.3 Further details regarding the timeframes for associated papers for RCN Council meetings is set out in the RCN Policy and Process for Running Meetings.
13. Removal from RCN Council
- 13.1 As prescribed in Schedule Rule 1 of the RCN Royal Charter, the office of an elected RCN Council member shall be vacated if:
 - a) he or she ceases to be a member
 - b) he or she becomes bankrupt or makes any arrangement or composition with his or her creditors generally
 - c) the Council members reasonably believe he or she is suffering from mental health disorder and is incapable of acting and the Council then resolves that he or she is removed from office.

- d) he or she fails to attend four consecutive meetings of the Council in any period in which six consecutive meetings are held provided that where such Council member's failure to attend meetings is due to illness the Council may in its discretion allow that Council member to continue in office.
- e) he or she is removed by resolution of the College in General Meeting before the expiry of his or her term of office subject to the procedures as set out in Rules 1.6.1-1.6.3 of the Royal Charter.
- f) he or she ceases to be a Council member in accordance with Regulations.
- g) he or she ceases to be a Council member by virtue of any provision of the Company Directors' Disqualification Act 1986 (or any replacement thereof) or he or she becomes prohibited by law from being a Council member.

13.2 An elected RCN Council member may also be removed before the end of their term of office on the grounds of they:

- a) have failed to discharge their duties
- b) have acted in breach of the RCN Code of Conduct and/or Respect Charter.
- c) have acted in a manner likely to bring the RCN into disrepute.
- d) have any active cautions from the NMC, or other regulator, against their name, are currently subject to any NMC, or other regulator's sanction, and/or they are subject to any ongoing disciplinary proceedings with any of their employers or professional disciplinary proceedings before the NMC or another regulator.
- e) are subject to ongoing disciplinary proceedings in respect of any role they hold at the RCN and/or currently subject to any RCN disciplinary sanction.

13.3 The processes for such removal will be in accordance with the RCN Member Resolution and Disciplinary Policy.

These terms of reference will be reviewed every three years at a meeting of RCN Council but may be reviewed sooner if necessary. Any recommended changes will be subsequently approved by RCN Council.

They should be read in conjunction with the RCN Governance Operating Framework, the RCN Group Scheme of Delegation and other documents referred to above.

Version control:

The first version of these revised Terms of Reference was approved by RCN Council on 31 October 2024.

Amended to reflect resolutions passed at the AGM on 17 July 2025.

Amended by RCN Council on 4 February 2026.

Reviewed and updated on 2 March 2026 in light of changes arising from the RCN Office Holder Eligibility Regulations, which came into effect on 1 January 2026, and to ensure the harmonisation of language and policy titles across all Committee and Board terms of reference.