



**The Royal College of Nursing  
of the United Kingdom**

**93rd Ordinary General Meeting**

**Draft Minutes**

**The 93<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal College of Nursing of the United Kingdom was held on Friday 14 May 2021 at 11.00. The meeting was held online due to the Coronavirus pandemic.**

The meeting was chaired by Professor Dame Anne Marie Rafferty FRCN, President of the Royal College of Nursing.

**1. Welcome and introductions**

- 1.1. The President welcomed everyone to the 93<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal College of Nursing.
- 1.2. She introduced Chair of Council Dave Dawes, Vice Chair of Council Carol Popplestone, Acting General Secretary & Chief Executive Pat Cullen, Chair of Governance Support Committee, Geoff Earl, Chair of the Professional Nursing Committee Rachel Hollis, Chair of the Group Audit Committee Simon Lowe, fellow Council members, and members of the Executive Team.
- 1.3. A minute's silence was held in memory of all the members of the nursing profession who had lost their lives in the COVID pandemic.
- 1.4. The President continued by noting that earlier in the week the RCN had marked International Nurses' Day by recognising the incredible work of nursing staff throughout the world and who had faced the most challenging year.
- 1.5. A film had been produced to celebrate Nurses' Day and it was shown to the members attending the AGM.
- 1.6. The President continued by highlighting the central role nursing staff played in all aspects of health care.
- 1.7. She then declared the meeting open and confirmed that the quorum of 150 in person or by proxy had been achieved.
- 1.8. The technical aspects of the AGM online platform were explained, and members were asked to note that voting would take place following the discussion on the resolutions.
- 1.9. Members were asked to post their comments and questions using the message facility on the platform.
- 1.10. It was explained that any questions unanswered during the meeting would be included in a Q & A document which would be published on the website.

**2. Agenda Item 2 - Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 6 August 2020**

- 2.1. Members were asked to raise points of accuracy and matters arising on the minutes.
- 2.2. Katie Sutton asked for an update on the review of RCN forums and networks including the criteria being used.
- 2.3. The Chair of the Professional Nursing Committee, Rachel Hollis, explained the review was underway though later than planned. A review of the criteria would be included as well as ways of working, and how forums and networks would be distinguished.
- 2.4. The report of the review would be published in the Autumn and there would be an opportunity for members to contribute beforehand.
- 2.5. Anthony Johnson asked why elected representatives had not declared conflicts of interest over the International Council of Nurses debate.
- 2.6. The President and Chair of Council stated that they were unaware of any

undeclared conflicts of interest. It was also explained that the RCN's Register of Interests process had been updated and a new Conflicts of Interest policy introduced.

- 2.7. Katie Sutton asked for the misspelling of names to be correct in the minutes. It was agreed to check through them all and to make any necessary amendments.
- 2.8. Jennifer Janes asked how the Forums Review fitted with the Member Categories Review, and for an update on progress with the latter.
- 2.9. It was explained that there were interdependencies between the two and that there were regular communications between the two Task & Finish Groups.
- 2.10. Geoff Earl, Chair of Governance Support Committee, explained that the first two phases of the membership categories review were due to be completed by the end of June.
- 2.11. It was explained that two consultations with members had already taken place and that the vision was for a single, equitable, and inclusive membership model to replace the existing membership categories.
- 2.12. The final stage of the work, which would take place between June and September, would be to look at the impact of the new model on the existing governance structure. The impact on existing policies would be considered as part of this work.
- 2.13. Craig Davidson asked if membership of Sigma Theta Tau should be declared on the Register of Interests. It was confirmed that members of Council had declared their membership of this organisation on the Register.
- 2.14. The Chair of Council explained the purpose of the Register of Interests was to ensure that any conflicts, perceived or otherwise, were managed appropriately.
- 2.15. He also explained that members of Council and committees were asked to declare any conflicts of interest on agenda items at the start of all meetings.
- 2.16. The President then took the Minutes as agreed subject to amending them in line with the points of accuracy that had been raised.
- 2.17. The draft Minutes would be published on the RCN website along with a Q&A document which would answer any questions that had not been answered at the meeting.

### **3. Agenda item 3 - 2020 Annual report of Council**

- 3.1 The Chair of Council introduced a short film of Council and committee members demonstrating the value of RCN membership and highlighting key facts and figures from 2020.
- 3.2 Members were invited to ask questions after the presentation on the financial statements.

### **4. Agenda item 4 – the 2020 Financial Statements**

- 4.1. The Chair explained that he was presenting the annual report on behalf of the Honorary Treasurer, Rod Thomson, who was unable to do so because of campaigning rules in the President election in which he was a candidate.
- 4.2. The Chair then thanked the Honorary Treasurer along with Simon Lowe, Chair of the Group Audit Committee, along with external advisers and staff, including new Finance Director Yajna Sooklall, for their work on the finances of the organisation.
- 4.3. Tim Golbourn, previous Finance Director, was thanked for his achievements over the preceding decade to move the RCN into a strong financial position.

- 4.4. The Chair expressed his sadness at the AGM having to be held online for the second year running due to the COVID pandemic.
- 4.5. In his presentation he highlighted the growth in membership over recent years and the consequent growth in income.
- 4.6. It was explained that the annual report and accounts were available to download from the meeting platform and from the RCN website.
- 4.7. The Chair also explained that the RCN Group was made up of four entities, the RCN charter body, the RCN Foundation, an independent charity, RCNi which produced Nursing Standard and a range of professional journals, and which was now moving into new digital products, and RCN HoldCo through which the RCN worked with an external firm of lawyers to handle personal injury claims.
- 4.8. The vast majority of the RCN's income of £81m came from membership subscriptions.
- 4.9. The RCN Foundation had an income of £6.7m which was a mixture of donations and investment income.
- 4.10. RCNi's income was £11.6m and RCN HoldCo's income was £285k.
- 4.11. This created a combined Group income of £96m. After expenditure of £84.4m this left a surplus of £11.2m. The surplus was due in part to the impact of COVID, and reduced levels of expenditure in areas such as events and travel and accommodation, as well as investment gains.
- 4.12. Members were asked to note the work the RCN Group had undertaken on its ethical investment policy.
- 4.13. The staff pension fund was noted as the RCN's single biggest financial risk but the deficit on the fund had now been reduced to £0.
- 4.14. It was also highlighted that the gender pay gap had been almost eliminated.
- 4.15. Members were asked to note that the RCN's Reserves were higher than forecast and provided a solid financial basis to the recently announced Industrial Action Fund of £35m, the largest in the UK.
- 4.16. It was also noted that the RCN had not increased subscriptions for six years.
- 4.17. Gordon Lees asked if the RCN would be supporting those members who did not wish to have a COVID vaccine.
- 4.18. In response Graham Revie, Chair of the Trade Union Committee, explained that the RCN's position was to support an individual's right to choose whether they had the vaccine or not, and would oppose any move by Government to make vaccines compulsory for health care staff.
- 4.19. Annie Ming asked about a pensions consultation and whether the RCN would be updating members on a weekly or monthly basis.
- 4.20. Graham Revie explained that the 2019 Mcleod/Sargeant judgment ruled that the manner in which transitional provisions had been implemented had given rise to unlawful age discrimination. This would be redressed across all public sectors, and the RCN would update members when there was more information.
- 4.21. He explained that it was expected that the pensions authorities would update members on their pension status every two years, and they may need to take individual action as they approached retirement age.
- 4.22. More information was available on the RCN website.
- 4.23. Donato Tallo highlighted the importance of RCN workplace reps and asked what the RCN was doing to highlight the benefits of their role.
- 4.24. The Chair of the Trade Union Committee stressed that a key area for the RCN was to lobby for increased facilities time in order to give Reps the time to carry out their role. Learning and development for Reps was also important as was staff support and mentorship.

- 4.25. Anthony Johnson asked if there could be an analysis of whether employers were completing RIDDOR reports when staff were off sick due to COVID-19.
- 4.26. Graham Revie explained that such work was being undertaken through the NHS Staff Council. It was noted also that RCN Safety Reps had been raising concerns about the lack of RIDDOR reporting and the RCN would be looking at the issue in more detail over the coming weeks.

## **5. Agenda item 5 – to consider and vote on three resolutions**

- 5.1. The President explained that members were being invited to vote on three resolutions.
- 5.2. The Chair of Congress, BJ Waltho, would be chairing the Q&A session following an introduction to the resolutions.

### **Resolution 1**

- 5.3. It was explained that the first resolution would enable the reinstatement of the cycle to elect half of Council every two years.
- 5.4. Members were reminded that after the 2016 Council review, Council had been reduced in size -but the cycle of electing half of Council every two years had not been re-instated.
- 5.5. It was explained this had to be done in order to be compliant with the Standing Orders.
- 5.6. Council elections were next due in 2023 for terms of office starting in 2024 so the adjustment needed to be before then.
- 5.7. It was explained that in 2023 some Council seats would need to be elected for two-years only. This would mean the term of office would be from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025. This would get the elections back into the necessary cycle.
- 5.8. It was being proposed that the two-year term seats on Council would be the same geographical four-year term seats which would be elected to the Trade Union Committee that year, thereby providing continuity in relation to trade union matters in each geographical section.
- 5.9. It was noted that this was an ordinary resolution and would require a simple majority to pass.
- 5.10. There were no questions on the resolution but Craig Davidson and Cynthia Davidson both stated that they supported the resolution, and that the adjustment was necessary.

### **Resolution 2**

- 5.11 The President explained that the second resolution was to make a small amendment to the Standing Orders.
- 5.12 In 2019 an RCN Council Task & Finish Group, led by Council member Richard Jones, had developed a new Member Resolution Policy and Code of Conduct. During this work legal advice had been sought and there had been a recommendation that the terminology on unfitting conduct should be amended in the Standing Orders.
- 5.13 This would need to be agreed by special resolution in general meeting. Special resolutions require a two-thirds majority to pass.
- 5.14 Roy Tomlinson asked whether this related to the removal of members from the NMC or the RCN?

- 5.15 The Chair of the Governance Support Committee, Geoff Earl, clarified that Standing Order 5.5 related to standards of behaviour. He also explained that to be in the Nurse member category of the RCN members had to be registered with the NMC. Should an individual be struck off the register they would also, therefore, be removed from membership of the RCN.
- 5.16 The RCN was also at liberty to report members to the NMC if appropriate.
- 5.17 It was explained that members had been consulted on the new Code of Conduct and the Member Resolution policy, and the amendment to the Standing Order was the only remaining action arising from the work.
- 5.18 Cynthia Davis asked for clarification on the process if allegations of unfitting conduct were made against a member of Council or the Chair of Council.
- 5.19 The Chair of Council explained that the new policy and process ensured that there would be fair and independent process conducted by an external panel.
- 5.20 Ian Norris asked for clarity on the difference between misconduct and gross misconduct, and Christina Sosseh asked for further information about the meaning of suspension from the roll. It was confirmed that this was explained within the new policy but the definition was not at hand. The information would be provided in the Q&A after the AGM.
- 5.21 It was also confirmed that the resolution was not related to the content of the policy itself as this had already been agreed and was already being implemented.

### **Resolution 3**

- 5.22 Members were reminded that in 2013, RCN members voted to discontinue the RCN's membership of the International Council of Nurses (ICN).
- 5.23 The RCN International Committee and RCN Council had since consulted members as to whether views in relation to the ICN had changed. The consultation had taken place from 30 October until the end of November 2020.
- 5.24 Background information and the consultation outputs had been made available to help inform the decision by members at the AGM.
- 5.25 It was confirmed that this was an ordinary resolution and would require a simple majority to pass.
- 5.26 Paul Trevatt asked how the RCN could aspire to inform and influence global nursing outside of the International Council of Nurses? There was also a question about what credible alternative there would be given that the World Health Organization turned to ICN for advice and information on global nursing matters.
- 5.27 The President confirmed that ICN was the only body which had a special relationship with WHO.
- 5.28 This was reiterated by Chair of the Professional Nursing Committee who explained that ICN was the only international nursing body which had an official relationship with WHO and could represent nursing at the World Health Assembly.

- 5.29 The Chair of the Trade Union Committee confirmed that ICN had a relationship with the International Labor organisation.
- 5.30 A statement from Geoff Earl, Council member, was read out.
- 5.31 This argued that less costly alternatives could have been considered and that the ICN membership fee structure discriminated against larger membership organisations. It also stated that ICN had not been able to demonstrate its effectiveness as an organisation. In addition a number of governance issues should be resolved and he was concerned that ICN did not recognise Nursing Support Workers or Nursing Associates.
- 5.32 Consequently, Geoff Earl would be voting against the resolution.
- 5.33 Anthony Johnson asked whether the RCN had considered an alliance membership of ICN and asked for clarification on the pros and cons of such membership.
- 5.34 In respect of the fee structure the President clarified that the structure had been amended in 2015 and that it was now capped at a ceiling of 10% of overall ICN income. This would mean that the RCN would pay no more than 450-500k Swiss Francs per year or around £1 per member per year.
- 5.35 It would not be discriminatory because the same rules would apply to all organisations.
- 5.36 It was confirmed that some organisations within countries did form alliances and had joined ICN on that basis. In the UK, however, it was not clear which other organisations the RCN could form an alliance with in order to join ICN on that model.
- 5.37 Paul Jebb asked how the RCN had engaged with members on the ICN question in advance of the AGM.
- 5.38 It was explained that there had been a consultation process which had included a member survey. The data from the survey had been included in the pack which had been made available to members in advance of the AGM. A number of webinars had also taken place.
- 5.39 Andrea Spyropoulos asked whether the 2013 AGM discussion on leaving ICN had been made available to members. It was confirmed that previous minutes of AGMs were available but that particular request had not been made until now.
- 5.40 Craig Davidson made reference to the decision to leave ICN and highlighted that a promise had been made that all money spent on ICN would be diverted to other global nursing projects and networking opportunities. He questioned whether there was any evidence of that happening.
- 5.41 The Chair of Council answered by stating that, although, this had probably been well intentioned the RCN had not incurred the same level of expenditure on international activity since leaving ICN.
- 5.42 Joan Pons Laplana asked for confirmation that RCN membership subscriptions would not be increase if the RCN were to re-join ICN.
- 5.43 The Chair of Council confirmed this would not be the case and asked members to note that there would not be an increase in member subscriptions for any reasons in 2021.

- 5.44 Rachel Lloyd-Giles asked why the RCN had left ICN and had the decision been related to Brexit.
- 5.45 It was confirmed that the decision in 2013 had been related to the cost of the ICN subscription fee. There had also been concerns over the effectiveness of the organisation and governance.
- 5.46 Paul Brown commented that the issue was cost and not whether there was an alternative.
- 5.47 Felicia Cox asked whether consideration had been given to working with Unison and Unite to join as a collective. It was confirmed that no such discussions had taken place.
- 5.48 John Hill commented that he believed the RCN would obtain better value for money by recruiting more full-time officers.
- 5.49 Mike Travis asked about the ongoing cost to the RCN over and above the subscription fee. It was confirmed that there would be minimal additional cost and most likely to be no more than the amount paid currently on international activity.
- 5.50 Charlotte Jakob-Hall asked for clarification on the real term cost per member of re-joining ICN. Yajna Sooklall, Director of Finance, confirmed that it would equate to approximately £1 per member per year.
- 5.51 Geoff Earl commented that the calculation was more complex given that ICN did not represent Nursing Support Workers, and that costs would fluctuate from year to year.
- 5.52 Denise Llewellyn asked what steps the RCN had taken to negotiate costs. In response the Chair of Council said that he had seen discussions had taken place after the RCN had left the ICN. It appeared there had been some action taken up and the fee had been reduced.
- 5.53 Jane Newson commented that it was only at international level that the RCN could make its voice heard for the most vulnerable patients.
- 5.54 Danielle Tiplady urged members to vote against the resolution as she believed that ICN had not changed since the RCN had left it in 2013.
- 5.55 Christina Terry and Shelly Pearce asked whether the issues which had caused the RCN to leave in 2013 had been addressed.
- 5.56 In response the Chair of Council said there were different points of view on that question but the information provided was factual.
- 5.57 However, evidence provided by ICN itself indicated that their ability to influence globally had strengthened. They had also undertaken significant work in areas such as patient safety and staffing, and in support of countries in conflict. ICN had also set up a separate fund to support humanitarian work in areas such as Beirut, Sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Eastern Europe.
- 5.58 Pauline Dorrington asked for clarification on which members would not be members of ICN. It was confirmed there was no direct linkage between membership of ICN and membership of the RCN. Rather, the RCN would join as an organisation.
- 5.59 Ali Upton commented that if ICN was so forward thinking why was nursing



globally in such a bad way currently. Nurses in India may not agree that ICN was influential globally currently.

- 5.60 In response it was suggested that only nurses in India would be able to reply to that question.
- 5.61 Stella Zengwa commented that the RCN was doing itself an injustice in terms of global influencing by remaining outside of ICN.
- 5.62 Maura Buchanan commented that, previously, ICN fees had been calculated on the basis of the number of registered nurse members. Hence the reason student member numbers had not been included. However, students were allowed to engage in the work of ICN.
- 5.63 Neil Thompson questioned why the RCN would want to be part of an organisation that didn't support Nursing Support Workers.
- 5.64 It was clarified that nursing was defined differently across the world and other countries did not make the same distinction between the registered and non-registered workforce. However, if the RCN re-joined ICN it would be doing so on behalf of all its members.
- 5.65 Jessica Sainsbury asked who would represent the RCN at ICN meetings if the vote to re-join was passed.
- 5.66 The Chair of Council confirmed that this would be a matter for discussion at the time but both the President and Chair of Council would be able to represent the RCN on international matters along with other members and staff as appropriate.
- 5.67 Craig Davidson asked about the appropriateness of organisations holding events in areas where there were human rights abuses.
- 5.68 The Chair of the Trade Union Committee said that, in such instances, he would urge the RCN not to take part.
- 5.69 Matthew Tacey asked for information about the ICN's relationship with pharmaceutical companies given that it may differ from the RCN's.
- 5.70 The President confirmed that ICN had very strict ethics and protocols in these areas. These were subject to audit and a special Risk Committee provided an additional layer of scrutiny.
- 5.71 It was also clarified that ICN was subject to different laws to the UK in the area of finance and financial transparency.

### **Voting**

- 5.72 The President announced that, at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> April, RCN Council had called a poll on the resolutions. This would mean that all the votes cast by proxy would be counted.
- 5.73 The President then explained the mechanics of how to vote on the online platform and asked members to cast their vote if they had not already done so.

## **6. Agenda item 6 – Matters of a professional character**

- 6.1 Members present were invited to discuss matters of a professional characters which were of importance to the members.
- 6.2 The President also reminded members of the monthly Town Hall meetings which were an additional way for members to raise questions throughout the year.
- 6.3 Rebecca Emmins asked whether there could be standardisation of the RCN's structure across the regions as it was complex for members to understand.
- 6.4 The Chair of Council explained that there had been regular attempts to relook at the structure and that he was sure it would feature in the forthcoming governance review.
- 6.5 Cecilia Anim asked about the recent departure of senior staff members from the RCN.
- 6.6 The Chair of Council responded that they had left for a variety of reasons including retirement or because they had moved on to new roles. He explained that he had had discussions with all of them prior to them leaving.
- 6.7 John Hill and Jane –Elizabeth Tooke asked for an update on branches and forums working together.
- 6.8 The Chair of the Professional Nursing Committee explained that the review of forums was now underway. It would include a review of how forums and branches worked together, particularly where there were inconsistencies.
- 6.9 The Chair of the Trade Union Committee added that the professional and the trade union sides of the organisation worked very closely together and contributed to each other's work.

## **7. Concluding remarks**

### **Chair of Council, Dave Dawes**

- 7.1 The Chair of Council spoke about his upbringing and how it influenced his decision to enter nursing at the age of 18 and become a union rep.
- 7.2 He spoke about the struggle nursing had endured over the years and how the language of fighting for something didn't always sit comfortably with the traditional values of nursing such as kindness and compassion.
- 7.3 He stressed that the fight for a decent pay rise for nursing staff and safe staffing would be key priorities for the RCN in the coming year, and members would have to make important and difficult decisions in respect of industrial action. The pandemic had demonstrated the value of nursing staff, and the country owed them a debt it could never repay.
- 7.4 The RCN would be investing £35m in a strike fund and continuing to train 25,000 members with the skills to organise so they would be ready to confront any opposition to the pay rise.
- 7.5 The Chair of Council made a personal pledge to draw on the skills and experience of his upbringing to fight on behalf of nursing in the pay struggle in the coming months.

## **President, Anne Marie Rafferty**

- 7.6 The President concluded the AGM with reflections and observations on her time in office as well as her hopes for the future.
- 7.7 Most of her tenure as President had been spent during the COVID pandemic and she had witnessed its devastating impact on communities and patients.
- 7.8 Nursing staff had worked tirelessly to mitigate its effects putting themselves at risk and, in some cases, paying the ultimate price.
- 7.9 COVID had also put social inequities and injustices to the fore.
- 7.10 Drawing on the legacy of Dr Martin Luther King the President reflected on the importance of sharing dreams and put forward her hopes for the future.
- 7.11 Decent pay and pay progression would aid in the machinery to improve recruitment and retention. She believed the entire pay system would need to be redesigned and reengineered so that it supported pay progression.
- 7.12 She also stressed the importance of effective workforce planning aligned to a sustainable operating model for health and care. On its own she did not see that recruiting 50,00 extra nurses would provide a resolution. The over-reliance on international nurses was proving to have tragic consequences. It would be important to set targets for domestic self-sufficiency underpinned with a ten-year strategy.
- 7.13 Increasing placement capacity, diversifying entry routes and delivery modes for course would also be key to a sustainable future workforce.
- 7.14 She also raised the point that the UK was still an outlier in the world by not regulating advanced practice and that this would help to strengthen career progression and the leadership function to provide adequate workforce support.
- 7.15 The President called for CPD funding for postgraduate training and education across the career pathway.
- 7.16 Finally, she called for safer staffing based on population modelling and patient outcomes.
- 7.17 The President stressed that it would be important to see these asks as civil and human rights. She felt confident that moving to an organising model would empower and help the RCN to achieve these dreams.
- 7.18 She concluded by thanking Dame Donna Kinnair, and all those who had supported her in her time as President.

## 8. Voting results

### Resolution 1 – (ordinary resolution, required a simple majority)

To reinstate the cycle of half of Council being elected every two years at the Council elections due to be held in 2023 as follows:

Four year terms (1 January 2024 to 31 December 2027)

Eastern	Northern
East Midlands	Northern Ireland
London	North West

Two-year terms (1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025)

Scotland	Wales
South East	West Midlands
South West	Yorkshire & the Humber

For	Against	Abstain	For%	Against%	Total votes
8,466	661	672	92.76%	7.24%	9,799

**The resolution was passed.**

### Resolution 2 (special resolution – required a 2/3 majority)

To amend Standing Order 5.5 as follows:

Subject to a Member's statutory rights the Council shall have power to discipline any Member (including power to order the removal of the Member from the Roll) who in the opinion of the Council ~~has been guilty of conduct unfitting of a Member~~ **has not met the standards of behaviour and conduct expected of them**, provided that no Member's name be removed (or suspended) from the Roll for this reason unless that Member shall have been given a reasonable opportunity of being heard by the Council or a committee established by Council in his or her own defence. The Council shall for this purpose make Regulations laying down how ~~allegations of unfitting conduct~~ **an allegation that a member has not met the standards of behaviour and conduct expected of them** shall be investigated and adjudicated upon, what duty there shall be to report it and what sanctions (including removal or suspension from the Roll) may be imposed where ~~unfitting conduct~~ **misconduct or gross misconduct** is found, as well as any matters attendant thereon;

For	Against	Abstain	For%	Against%	Total votes
8,452	680	664	92.55%	7.45%	9,796

**The resolution was passed.**

**Resolution 3 – (ordinary resolution, required a simple majority)**

Should the RCN re-join the International Council of Nurses?

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>	<b>For%</b>	<b>Against%</b>	<b>Total votes</b>
7,613	1,375	812	84.7%	15.3%	9,800

**The resolution was passed.**