

Questions raised at the RCN Annual General Meeting 2018

We have included responses provided at the meeting together with supplementary information where helpful.

Questions on the minutes and matters arising from the AGM in 2017.

Acknowledging reps

Why isn't there more acknowledgment of the work undertaken by stewards, safety reps, learning reps and student information officers in the RCN's various reports? For example the annual report and accounts 2017.

Maria Trewern, Chair of RCN Council, acknowledged that this was a very important point. It will be taken into consideration when planning the 2018 annual report. The work of our activists cannot be under-estimated and should be reflected appropriately within our reporting documentation.

RCN financial health

What is the financial health of the RCN generally and its ability to meet its obligations in relation to the pension scheme? Is the Director of Finance still happy with the financial position?

Tim Golbourn, Director of Finance and Business Enablement, reassured members at the meeting that the overall financial sustainability of the College is good. He explained that the Annual Report 2017 includes a statement from the independent auditors in relation to going concern which supports this position. Nonetheless challenges do exist - the staff pension deficit needs to be reduced and income needs to grow. The RCN has plans in place to meet these challenges and RCN Council will be monitoring progress over the coming year.

Standing orders and reserves

Is a root and branch review of the RCN's Standing Orders still planned? Is there progress on the review of the RCN's reserves position?

Maria Trewern, Chair of Council, advised that a number of reviews were being planned, including the Standing Orders. In addition, major reviews of the transition to the new governance structure and the new governance procedures were being planned. The RCN's Standing Orders are reviewed on a regular basis and the last significant changes

were made in 2016 to reflect the outcomes of the review of Council. In respect of the question on reserves, the RCN has a Reserves Policy which is reviewed annually as part of the financial strategy. Council sets the RCN Group and RCN reserves policy based on recommendations from the Finance & Investment Committee.

Income generation

What has been learnt from looking at the differences between the RCN and other professional organisations in generating trading income?

Dave Dawes, Honorary Treasurer, addressed this question in his speech at the AGM. He explained that some other organisations, specifically other Royal Colleges, derived a higher percentage of their income from sources other than membership fees. Often, that included income from professional examinations or accreditation. The RCN's new commercial strategy is designed to increase the RCN's income from other revenue streams derived from a range of activities and it will not be directly comparable to other organisations.

Collaborative working

What progress is being made on encouraging more collaborative working between forums, boards and branches?

Dame Donna Kinnair, Director of Nursing, Policy and Practice answered this question at the meeting by confirming that forums, boards and branches were all consulted on all major policy positions and that there was a well established process in place to do that. Following the recent review of country and regional boards the Governance Support Committee will be looking specifically at the links between boards and branches and forums. The RCN's new Member Communication Centre is also playing a significant role in developing member to member links as is the development of new digital media channels. Events such as RCN Congress are also significant in enabling members to connect with each other. It is vitally important that

communications between the RCN's various entities are maintained and strengthened and members are encouraged to flag up any specific areas of concern so that improvements can continue to be made.

Members with disabilities

What work is being undertaken to support members with disabilities - especially those with hidden disabilities? Could conference delegates be given special lanyards to identify them as requiring support?

RCN President, Cecilia Anim, confirmed that work was ongoing on this issue. This issue is included in the work programme for Congress 2019 and added to the Equalities and diversity work stream of the Congress project plan. The lanyard scheme will be introduced for members who wish to be identified in this way, and more work will be undertaken to brief staff and event ambassadors on how to support those with hidden disabilities.

Accuracy of minutes

Why is there no page numbering in the minutes? And why is the paragraph numbering the way it is?

The Governance team will ensure that the AGM minutes include page numbering in future and will build in extra checks to their proof-reading processes. Having checked the paragraph numbering in the minutes, we can confirm that it is in line with the style for RCN minutes.

Questions on the 2017 Financial Statements and Annual Report of Council

Big Issue

Why does the RCN sponsor Big Issue sellers and where does it show within the College's finances?

At the meeting Dave Dawes said that, as the amount was relatively small, it was not identifiable in the accounts. Tim Golbourn confirmed that expenditure associated with the Big Issue was included under 'other service delivery costs' in the financial statements. The RCN has supported The Big Issue by sponsoring their red tabards as part of a corporate collaboration to raise the profile of both organisations. The charity is also supported by RCN staff as part of the "Giving Something Back" staff policy. Staff members undertake fundraising events such as cake sales and sporting challenges. The "Giving Something Back" policy was introduced in 2015 and a charity is chosen annually for the staff to support. Prior to 2018 staff raised funds for Age UK.

Commercial strategy

Will the RCN's commercial strategy impact on the cost of study days if increased commercial activity impacts on the RCN's membership?

Dave Dawes advised that the RCN would be looking at a range of opportunities to increase its revenue and this may include events, conferences and educational activities. There is no anticipation that the membership of the RCN will change because of its commercial strategy but it will be monitored and reviewed.

Union and professional activity

Are the RCN's union and professional activities funded from different sources of income?

Dave Dawes confirmed at the meeting that as 95% of the College's income came from membership, the majority of both Trade Union activity and professional activity is supported by membership income. For accounting purposes, and to satisfy the requirements of the Trade Union Return to the Certification Officer, the RCN does report a split in its income between representation (i.e. Trade Union) activities and other college activities. In 2017 this is recorded as 67.93% for Representation and 32.07% other activities. The Annual Report 2017 contains more details - see page 35.

Weak Pound

Has account been taken of the impact of the weakening pound on the projection for the pension deficit being cleared in eight years? What view has been taken on the impact of Brexit on the pound and on the country's GDP?

In response Dave Dawes explained that the Finance and Investment Committee was currently overseeing a review by an independent adviser of the performance of our Investment Managers. This includes reviewing how, in the future, to get the balance right between long term investment and investments that can meet the College's liabilities. He also said that the impact of any currency fluctuations was limited because of the long term nature of our investments.

ICN

What was the cost of the RCN's membership of ICN (International Council of Nurses) at the time the RCN withdrew? Do decisions about joining or leaving ICN need to come to an AGM?

In 2012, the year prior to the RCN's withdrawal from ICN, the RCN invoiced fee was £597.7k. ICN fees were based on the membership size of the member organisation. Consequently, the RCN's contribution had risen dramatically in line with its increase in membership and had also been subject to fluctuations in sterling against the Swiss Franc (ICN is based in Geneva). This resulted in the RCN paying 16% of the ICN's overall fee income and was not sustainable in the long term. Consequently, in 2013, RCN members at the AGM voted to withdraw from ICN membership. The vote followed lengthy negotiations to try and secure changes to the membership fee structure and to improve ICN's effectiveness. The RCN left ICN "in good standing" paying its fees for the notice period. This does mean that it could apply in future to rejoin if it wished. Any decisions about joining or leaving ICN must come to a general meeting of RCN members. This requirement is laid out in the RCN's Standing Orders (SO 4.1).

Carrillion collapse

In view of the criticisms around the governance and audit processes included in the report about the collapse of Carrillion, could assurance be given that the same issues could not arise at the RCN?

At the meeting Dave Dawes said, that in his experience, the audit process adopted by the RCN was about the best he had experienced. There are two types of audit carried out within the RCN – external and internal. External audit provides an independent opinion on the financial statements. It is a mandatory requirement and provides important assurance that the financial statements present a true and fair view of the financial standing and accounts of the organisation.

Internal audit is a support to management; helping to ensure that the right systems, processes and controls are in place, but it also provides an assurance to those charged with governing an organisation that the controls in place are operating effectively and can be relied upon.

The RCN employs Deloitte to carry out its external audits and BDO for its internal audits. The Audit Committee provides scrutiny of all the internal audits carried out.

Disciplinary process

Is the RCN disciplinary process being reviewed?

Maria Trewern assured members that the policy was to be reviewed with the involvement of both the Trade Union Committee and Professional Nursing Committee.

Branch treasurers

What is the role of the branch treasurer in light of changes to the way that branch finances were run?

Dave Dawes confirmed that the role of branch treasurers had changed. This change was introduced following the review of the branch policy and process document in 2015.

The role of the branch treasurer is to lead the planning and budgeting process for the branch and to link with the Board to ensure that branch activities are reflected in the annual country/regional plan and budget. The treasurer will also be the link with the country and regional staff on matters relating to the branch budget, and will also present the branch financial position at the branch AGM. More information on the role is contained in the branch role descriptors on this page on the RCN website. www.rcn.org.uk/about-us/how-the-rcn-is-governed/our-governance-documents

RCNi

Why have RCNi's profits reduced? What is RCNi planning to do to improve this figure?

Tim Golbourn, Director of Finance and Business Enablement, said that the area of business in which the RCNi was operating (producing journals, media, news etc.) was facing significant challenges. Although income had reduced, there was a change within the top line of the income mix. In response RCNi has altered its business strategy and is now focussing on business to business and on changing its product mix to digital, more learning products and CPD.

RCN Bulletin

Given the current financial climate and emphasis on sustainability, should it be mandatory for all members, for whom the RCN has an e-mail address, to receive RCN Bulletin online as a PDF and in a mobile-friendly format?

In response Maria Trewern agreed that it was important that all members received the RCN Bulletin in their preferred format. All members for which the RCN has an email address automatically receive the online version of *RCN Bulletin* which links to the new digital magazine platform here www.rcn.org.uk/magazines. Members can opt-out of receiving the printed *RCN Bulletin* by going to www.rcn.org.uk/myrcn *RCN Bulletin* is not produced as a .pdf file because of the difficulty of opening such files on some devices.

Students and branches

How are students allocated their RCN branch?

Tim Golbourn explained that students are automatically allocated to a branch based on the location of their university. However, students may change their branch to one based on the location of their clinical placement if they prefer. To do this students can simply call RCN Direct on 0345 7726100.

Credentialing

Can information about the credentialing of nurses by the RCN be included in the Annual Report?

There are references to the launch of credentialing by the RCN on pages 3 and 4 of the 2017 annual report. We will be in a better position to report on this service in next year's report.

Annual report query

Why isn't England listed separately on page 12 in the tables of the annual report?

The table referred to is organised by how government works across the UK, rather than being a list of the individual countries within the UK. "Westminster" means the UK parliament. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have specific devolved powers (including health) exercised through their own legislatures. There is no such devolved government in England.

Congress in Wales

Are there plans for Congress to go to Wales?

Maria Trewern said that it had been a long term priority to find a venue in Wales that could accommodate Congress. A meeting had recently been held with the team from the new ICC Wales and it was hoped that the new venue would be able to host Congress at some point in the future. Council's decision about the venue for Congress is based on a number of factors including cost, suitability, availability and location. Venues are usually booked at least 3 to 4 years in advance.

Gender pay gap

Does the RCN also collect information on those who do not identify as male or female; and, if not, is it possible to do so?

Dave Dawes confirmed that the gender pay gap reporting was set down in legislation and specifically related to male and female. More information about the legal requirement is available on the Government website here: www.gov.uk/guidance/gender-pay-gap-reporting-overview. Janet Davies said that the RCN did not currently collect gender neutral data from staff, but was looking to do so in the future.

Environmental impact of Congress

Should the environmental burden of air flights be taken into account when planning the venue of Congress?

Dave Dawes said this should be considered as part of the review and evaluation of Congress 2018. The environmental impact of Congress is

an important consideration and members have already contributed, very welcome, views to the Congress Project Board. Some changes were made this year - for example we reduced the print runs of some of the paper-based materials in order to reduce waste. We will also work with venues on matters such as recycling and the use of plastics and, through our Expenses Policy, encourage delegates to use public transport.

Retired members

What is the RCN doing to retain its retired members?

Maria Trewern said that the Congress debate earlier in the week on this subject had provided very useful information for Council. It had raised concern about how retired member networks in particular varied across the UK, and agreed that it would be important to ensure there was greater consistency. Retired members pay just £10 per year to encourage them to stay part of the RCN.

Pension deficit

Can you provide more detail about the pension deficit?

Dave Dawes referred to pages 48-53 of the Annual Report 2017 which provides more information about the deficit. The RCN's defined benefit scheme had a deficit valued at £52.1m following the scheme's valuation in September 2016. The deficit-funding plan has included a one-off payment of £4.9m and deficit payments rising annually by RPI. From 1 April 2018 the annual deficit recovery payment will be £3.18m. Combined contribution rates have increased by 0.4% as a result of the September 2018 valuation and this has been shared equally by the employees in the scheme and the RCN as the employer.

Members in care homes

How many RCN members work in care homes?

Approximately 30,000 RCN members currently work in care homes.

Questions on the resolution which asked members to authorise Council to set the subscription fee for a further five years and to freeze subscription levels for 2018 and 2019.

Student fees freeze

Would Council consider freezing the student fees for the full five years?

Dave Dawes agreed at the meeting that this is something Council could consider but that the normal decision process, which include a member consultation, would need to be undertaken first. In advance of each calendar year the RCN's Finance and Investment Committee considers a number of financial assumptions before making recommendations to Council on the subscription rate. Council has committed to freezing the fees for 2018 and 2019 so any further changes to the rate would not be considered until 2019 (for implementation in 2020) at the earliest. Fees for RCN Students have been frozen for many years.

Fees increase?

If the resolution was not accepted, would there be an increase in fees? And, if it were to be accepted, what would the increase be in two years' time?

Dave Dawes stated that if the resolution were not accepted, Council's ability to undertake long term financial planning would be reduced. If the resolution was not passed Council would not have the power to increase fees and there would need to be a proposal to members at a General Meeting about the subscription fees. If the resolution was passed any proposed increase in fees for 2020 or beyond would be subject to member consultation and he could not at the present time predict what such a proposed figure might be.

Fees cap

What will the maximum cap be?

Dave Dawes confirmed that following feedback received, no cap had been set. Council's track record showed its commitment to keeping any fee increases at a minimum level.

Banded subs

Should different subscription rates be applied to people on different pay bands?

Dave Dawes stated that this idea had been discussed previously by Council and, in fact,

had also been debated at Congress on a previous occasion (2001). The proposal had not received support in the past.

Council commitment

How binding is Council's commitment to the resolution?

Dave Dawes said that he could not think of any circumstance arising that meant that Council was not bound by a resolution voted for at an AGM.

Branch consultation

Why wasn't Greater Manchester Branch consulted on the resolution?

Dave Dawes said that boards were asked to consult with branches although timing issues may have arisen. He committed that if it was found that consultations were not undertaken, lessons would be learnt to avoid any repetition of this. The North West Board received the presentation on the proposed resolution for discussion at its meeting in February. The RCN Governance Support Committee has the issue of Branch/Branch communications on its agenda.

Subscriptions increase

Is the RCN planning to increase its subscription rates in light of the resolution that was being put to the AGM?

Dave Dawes explained that part of the resolution being put to the AGM was that membership fees would be frozen for 2018 and 2019.

Subscription process

How will the RCN proceed with setting the annual subscription fees if the vote went against the motion?

Maria Trewern confirmed that, should the resolution not be passed, then members would need to vote in a General Meeting to approve any increase or change to the current subscription rate. This is set down in the RCN's Standing Orders (SO 6.1). A copy of the Standing Orders can be downloaded from this page on the RCN website www.rcn.org.uk/about-us/how-the-rcn-is-governed/our-governance-documents

Questions on matters of a professional nature

Government pay offer

Has the College misrepresented the Government's pay offer?

At the meeting Janet Davies said that Congress had already discussed the issues and concerns some members had raised around comments and information on the pay deal. She apologised if any word used had caused offence. It was, however, important to remember that some of what was being reported were not direct quotes, some not directly the position of the RCN and some of it press reporting. The RCN recommends that members in England accept the NHS pay deal. The deal is a package that includes pay reform, a cash uplift and a pay rise. It also protects unsocial hours, annual leave and sick pay. Members will receive a 3% pay rise in the first year, with around 50% receiving 6.5% over the life of the deal and some getting much more. In a time of austerity it is believed that this deal, the strongest in a decade, is the best that can be achieved. Members in England were consulted and the outcome was discussed on June 6th at a meeting of the Trade Union Committee.

ICN

Can a debate be facilitated within the RCN membership to explore the benefits to UK nurses of the RCN re-joining the International Council of Nurses (ICN)?

Maria Trewern reminded the meeting that this had been discussed earlier in response to previous questions. Any decision relating to re-joining the ICN would need to be voted for by the membership at an AGM. This requirement is laid out in the RCN's Standing Orders (SO 4.1).

SIOs

Has funding for the development programme for Student Information Officers been secured?

Dave Dawes assured the questioner that there were no plans to change funding. There was currently work underway to look at a UK development programme for SIOs. More information about the role of Student Information Officer is on the RCN website here www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/get-involved-as-a-student

GDPR

Can you provide guidance on GDPR training for reps and can reps be discredited if they failed to complete the training?

In relation to GDPR generally the RCN has been working on getting the RCN group GDPR-ready. This includes:

- a huge internal engagement campaign, with all staff required to complete GDPR online training
- specific training for reps and we are hoping to get close to 100% completion
- documenting what personal data we hold, where it came from and who we share it with
- identifying the lawful basis for processing activity
- updating our privacy notice and policies, including an updated data breach recording and reporting procedure
- creating a retention schedule about what data we keep and for how long
- appointing a Data Protection Officer
- introducing a process for members, customers and donors to tell us how they would like to be communicated with and what their interests are. Under GDPR legislation everyone with access to personal information is required to complete appropriate training. Our training for our reps has been tailored for them and a process has been agreed to support reps who have not done so to carry out that training. Ultimately however if the training is still not completed reps will be discredited but we hope that will not happen.