

Guide to RCN general meetings

The overarching rules for the RCN's general meetings, including the RCN annual general meeting (AGM), are set out in the RCN standing orders. This document explains in simple terms what those rules mean and how the business of a general meeting is carried out. Since 2014 the AGM has been held during Congress week, however it is not linked to the Congress agenda in any way and the Congress constitution and rules do not apply to general meetings.

Purpose of general meetings

The membership elects Council to govern the RCN on its behalf and holds Council to account for its progress. The AGM is the principal forum in which Council accounts to the membership for its stewardship of the organisation.

The purpose of the AGM, as defined in Standing Orders 14.3, is as follows:

The business of the annual general meeting shall be to receive the annual report of Council, the balance sheet and accounts of the College and report of the auditors, and to discuss matters of a professional character which in the opinion of the chair of the meeting are of importance in the interests of the members.

General meetings can also be convened by Council at its discretion or by 1,000 members requisitioning one. These are known as extraordinary general meetings and are normally convened to discuss a specific issue of importance to the membership.

Notifying members of a general meeting

The Chief Executive & General Secretary must give 21 days' notice of all general meetings, including the AGM. This is usually published in RCN Bulletin and on the RCN website. The notice of the meeting must set out the date and purpose of the meeting.

All RCN members are able to attend and vote at general meetings. Other people may attend as guests at the discretion of RCN Council.

What happens at the meeting

All general meetings of the RCN are chaired by the President or, in their absence, the Deputy President. The AGM must include the presentation of the Annual Report and financial statements and allow time for members to ask questions about it. Members can also:

- Ask questions on issues of concern to the membership and any items concerning the organisation's performance, past or future.
- Ask questions of a professional character which, in the opinion of the chair, are of importance to members.

Resolutions

There may also be specific resolutions for approval by the members. These can be put forward by Council or, in the case where a meeting has been requested by 1,000 members, by the members themselves. There are two types of resolutions, each of which must be formally proposed and seconded:

- Ordinary Resolutions which are passed if a majority of the votes cast are in favour.
- Special Resolutions which require a minimum of a two thirds vote in favour. Special resolutions usually involve a proposal to amend the Charter and/or standing orders.

Resolutions cannot be amended once the notice of the meeting has been published. A revised resolution would require a new meeting to be called with members being given 21 days' notice. A communications plan would be implemented before the meeting to help members make an informed decision before they vote on the resolutions. Information is provided at the meeting, together with an opportunity for members to ask questions.

The conduct of the meeting is in the hands of the Chair. There is no set time for each person to speak but the Chair will ensure that as many members as possible are able to contribute to the discussion. Members cannot raise procedural matters or points of order in the same way as they do at Congress – those are rules just for Congress and do not apply to RCN general meetings.

Voting at general meetings

Voting in the first instance is by show of hands. This is in accordance with the RCN standing orders. However, the Standing Orders say that Council can also call a “poll of all members” prior to the meeting if they wish. In which case, a proxy voting form would be issued to all members before the meeting. This would enable members to appoint a proxy to vote at the meeting on their behalf. The proxy must be someone attending the meeting.

Alternatively, a poll can be called at the meeting itself. Details of how to cast a proxy vote in the event of this happening would be published alongside the notice of the AGM. The proxy votes would only be counted if a poll was called at the meeting. If a poll is called an independent scrutineer will verify that it is conducted properly.

Quorum and adjournments

There must be a quorum of 150 members either present in person at the meeting or by proxy. However, proxy votes only count towards the quorum if a poll of all members has been called. If the quorum isn't reached within 30 minutes the meeting should be adjourned and reconvened within two months. The quorum does not apply to the reconvened meeting.

A meeting would be adjourned if it is not quorate or if a request for more time to consider the issue is agreed by those who requisitioned the meeting. It is important to note that an adjourned meeting can only carry on unfinished business from the original meeting – therefore it could not consider an amended or new resolution.