The case for change

Since its foundation in 1916, the RCN has seen a number of fundamental changes to its status and legal structure. It was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1928; became a charity in 1963; was registered as a special register Trade Union in 1977; and in 2010 an independent foundation replaced the RCN Charitable Trust.

Although we have made this series of changes to our legal structure the main elements of the RCN’s present governance structure have remained unchanged for almost 40 years.

Those intervening years have seen the fastest level of growth in the RCN’s history, fundamental changes in our sector with vastly more complex regulatory frameworks, health and social care becoming a devolved matter to the four countries of the UK, unprecedented financial challenges to the NHS, and an increase to 30% of RCN members working in the independent sector.

In response, RCN Council appointed a Council Review Group in July 2014 to review the governance structure as a whole; how it meets the requirements for effective governance in today’s rapidly-changing world; how it supports our dual role as a trade union and royal college and how well it represents RCN members.

The Council Review Group’s (CRG) brief was to look at the role of Council, its committees and how they worked with the other parts of the governance and representative structure, with the Chief Executive & General Secretary, and with other senior staff and with members.

Their recommendations are based on the views of over 10,000 RCN members who responded to the CRG survey.
What did you tell us about our current governance arrangements and ways of working?

You said:

Our governance structure is key to demonstrating how we meet both our royal college and trade union responsibilities.

You want to ensure the organisation continues to be member-led.

You want to know Council has a real grip on what the organisation is doing and that your subscription is being spent to the best effect. You would like Council to look and act more like a decision-making Board rather than a Representative Body.

You would like decision-making to be more open and transparent and Council to be more accountable.

You want to see both our roles as a royal college and a trade union strengthened and, in particular, you feel Council needs to explain its strategy for addressing the status of the nursing profession and improving its standing and reputation.

You told us that our current governance structure is too large and unwieldy with too many committees which leads to a lack of clarity and transparency and makes too many demands on too few members.

Our decision-making, democratic processes and ways of working need to better reflect that health and social care policy is a devolved matter and that increasing numbers of our members are working in the independent sector/community settings.

We need to give higher priority to our equality and inclusion agenda and ensure it is delivered through our governance processes.

You don’t understand the different roles of the President, Chair of Council and Chief Executive & General Secretary.
What is the proposed new structure?

COUNCIL
17 elected members

AUDIT
Council-led appointment process

REMUNERATION
Council-led appointment process

GOVERNANCE
Council-led appointment process

BOARDS
A maximum of 15 directly elected members

MRC
14 directly elected members

NPPC
14 directly elected members

BUSINESS
Council-led appointment process
What will remain the same?

The structure continues to be driven by principles of a member-led organisation and trade union.

Council will continue to be the governing body of the organisation and the trade union executive.

Council will continue to be elected by the membership.

The President, Deputy President and Chair of Congress will continue to be members of Council.

The key committees will remain the same:

- Membership and Representation Committee (MRC) which is responsible for trade union activity
- Nursing Practice and Policy Committee (NPPC) which is responsible for the royal college work including the education agenda
- Business Committee which ensures that the organisation functions efficiently.

The key governance and assurance committees will remain the same.

Boards oversee the RCN’s activity in the countries and regions, and will continue to be strengthened as agreed in the 2012 Board Review.
What are the changes and why are we proposing them?

**There will be a stronger decision-making and reporting structure for the RCN Group which includes the RCN Charter Body, the RCN Foundation, the RCN Publishing Company (RCNi) and RCN Law.**

Council will be smaller and work more strategically, delegating work with a clear brief to the Council Committees, monitoring and evaluating the work being done and challenging performance outcomes.

The role of the Council Committees will be strengthened with a different membership to involve more members with a wider range of relevant skills and backgrounds.

In addition to the 14 members directly elected to Council, 14 members will be directly elected to each of the Membership and Representation Committee and Nursing Practice and Policy Committee.

The Council Committees will decide what committees and groups/networks they need to inform and deliver their work.

There will be a tailored training and development programme to support Council and Committee Members to develop their skills and competencies.

**Ongoing work**

There will be a root and branch re-think of our election policy and procedures to ensure we achieve better member engagement; they are seen to be fair and accessible for all and will lead to our governance structure reflecting both nursing and the society we service.

We will be reviewing the role and range of external advisers we require on our governance committees to strengthen assurance to Council about our systems and processes, risk management and our statutory compliance and to improve access for Council members to professional and independent advice.

The working arrangements for the Health Practitioner and Students Committee are under active review and the latest position will be reported as part of the AGM paperwork.

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Why are these changes important?

The RCN will have a very much simpler decision-making process which works smoothly and can be readily understood.

The process will allow the organisation to make better decisions, more quickly.

It will have a Council with a clear governance role which it is able to fulfil properly and can be held to account. It will have access to the advice and expertise it needs to inform its decision-making.

The Boards, branches, forums and committees are fundamental to the success and character of the organisation and will be strengthened by renewed clarity as to their terms of reference.

New terms of reference and revised governance processes will increase the pool of members willing to put their names forward for RCN positions.
How do you input your views and when do you vote?

The report will be published on the website with an online form for members to let us have your views.

Boards, Branches, Forums and Committees will be discussing the report at their meetings in April, May and June.

There will be a discussion at the 2016 Annual General Meeting on 21 June 2016 at the SEEC in Glasgow.

Council will be reviewing all your feedback before they back final decisions.

There are a small number of changes required to the Standing Orders to effect the changes to the composition of Council.

These will be discussed and voted on at the 2016 AGM.

The agenda for the meeting and all the details of the changes to the standing orders will be published in the 1 June issue of RCN Bulletin and on the website.

It will also be sent by email to all members.

Voting will be by a show of hands in accordance with Standing Order 17.1. Members unable to attend the AGM may vote by proxy at www.ersvotes.com/rcnagm16. Proxy votes will be counted in the event of a poll being called under Standing Order 13.