

Roles and responsibilities of the RCN Executive Team and RCN Council – Guidance Document

This document aims to set out the key roles and responsibilities for the RCN Executive Team and the RCN Council. It explains the composition and purpose of the RCN Executive Team and the RCN Council and highlights the differences between the two.

1) The RCN Council

Composition of the RCN Council

The RCN Council was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1928 by the then King, *King George the Fifth*. A Royal Charter is a *governance document, granted by a monarch, that forms a new corporate body and sets out the way in which it should be directed and controlled*.

Paragraph 7.1 of the RCN's Royal Charter states:

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.

As the RCN Council is enshrined in the Royal Charter, the RCN is legally bound to ensure that it has a Council.

The composition of the RCN Council is set out in the RCN's Standing Orders, which are the written rules of the RCN used to allow for the operation of internal governance. They confirm the RCN's internal organisational and administrative procedures. In accordance with the Standing Orders, paragraph 7.2 says:

There shall be 17 Council Members comprising the President, Deputy President, 14 Council Members elected in accordance with Standing Orders and the Chair of Congress ex officio¹. The Chair of Congress shall be a non-voting Council Member.

Therefore, the RCN Council comprises 17 members as set out above, all of whom are elected by their wider constituencies across the four nations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Council is led by a Chair, who is supported by a Vice Chair. These two positions, along with the Honorary Treasurer, are elected from amongst the Council members. Like the Chair of Congress, the President and Vice President are ex officio members. Council members, with the exception of the Chair of Council and President of Council, receive no emoluments for providing their time and expertise to Council. Council members must be registered nurses, with the exception of the Student Member, who must be a nursing student, and the Nursing Support Worker Member, who must be a Nursing Support Worker.

Purpose of the RCN Council

¹ Ex-officio means 'holding a position by virtue of having a different position'. Here, because the Chair of Congress holds the position of Chair of Congress, they are automatically a member of the RCN Council, albeit a non-voting member.

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 for the benefit of its members, to which it is accountable.

Working in conjunction with the Executive Team, Council ensures that the RCN always has a clear vision and mission, acts as a guardian of the RCN's assets, and decides *what* must be done in order to achieve the objectives of the Strategic Plan. It seeks assurance from the Executive Team that the day-to-day operations and the governance systems in place to direct and control the RCN are effective, efficient and robustly monitored.

The Council plays a key role in:

- Risk management – through its Audit Committee, the Council sets up risk management frameworks, reviews risk mitigation strategies, and monitors the effectiveness of internal controls to protect the RCN from potential threats such as a cyber-attack.
- Financial management – the Council has a duty to safeguard the interests and assets of its members. It must ensure that the accounts are audited annually by external auditors. In addition, it is responsible for ensuring that the annual accounts are a true representation of the financial position of the RCN and for signing them off each year.
- Member engagement – the Council is elected by and therefore engages with the wider membership of the RCN. It considers their interests and concerns, and it fosters positive relationships with its members. The Council also establishes committees to assist with its work. These committees and the UK Reps conferences are examples of ways in which Council engages the membership.
- Legal compliance – the RCN is the world's largest nursing union and professional body. Its Council is responsible for ensuring the RCN, its charity (the RCN Foundation) and its subsidiary companies (RCNi and RCN Hold Co) are legally compliant with any laws and regulations with which they are bound. As the RCN is an independent trade union in accordance with the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, the Council also has a duty to ensure that the activities of the RCN comply with the Act. The RCN is also a registered company which has annual financial filing obligations.

2) The Executive Team

Composition of the RCN Executive Team

The RCN's Executive Team comprises of salaried members of staff at Executive Director level and above, who are appointed for their expertise and who work collaboratively, to ensure that the day-to-day operations of the RCN are well lead and well managed.

Led by the General Secretary and Chief Executive, the RCN's Executive Team comprises the Chief Nursing Officer, a Chief of Staff, Executive Directors across each of the four countries, and also includes Executive Directors with specific responsibilities for HR, Finance, Estates, IT, Legal Services, Governance, Policy, Communications and Marketing.

More information about the individuals that form the Executive Team can be found at: [Executive Team | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](https://www.rcn.org.uk/Executive-Team)

The General Secretary and Chief Executive post is established in accordance with the Royal Charter of the RCN, which is the key governance document for the RCN. Paragraph 12 states:

The Council shall appoint the Chief Executive & General Secretary who shall be the Chief Executive Officer of the College in accordance with Regulations.

Therefore, the RCN must at all times have a General Secretary and Chief Executive who manages the Executive Team. The other Executive Team roles are not enshrined in the Charter and are, therefore, not mandatory roles. These roles may change and develop over time depending on the needs of the RCN as each of these roles has management responsibilities for a portfolio of work, often spanning more than one department.

Purpose of the RCN Executive Team

The Executive Team is responsible for providing strategic leadership and accountable for operational delivery within the RCN. It focuses on ensuring that the day-to-day operations of the RCN – for example HR, Finance or IT – are well run and that the organisation is well-led.

Whereas the Council defines strategically what the RCN needs to achieve, the Executive Team are responsible for how the RCN will do this through robust strategic leadership. Therefore, the Executive Team lead, manage and accomplish the work of the RCN within established boundaries and governance mechanisms e.g. the RCN's risk appetite, the Scheme of Delegation.

Working as an interdependent, collaborative decision-making body, the Executive Team, therefore, strategically executes the RCN's Strategic Plan as well as the mission and vision of the RCN, as signed off by the Council. The Executive Team uses the direction and boundaries provided by the Council to create tactical and operational policies that ensure that the RCN can accomplish its work and maintain its integrity.

The Executive Team also has a key role to play in assuring the Council that the governance systems in place to direct and control the RCN are effective, efficient and robustly challenged and monitored. The Executive Team does this by providing the Council with accurate, timely and focussed reporting information that it needs to appropriately monitor the RCN.

3) Differences between the RCN Council and the RCN Executive Team

As explained above, the Executive Team is comprised of salaried Executive Directors who are responsible for countries or directorates and are responsible for the leadership of RCN staff and accountable for service delivery. Members of the Executive Team have strategic leadership management responsibilities and are employees of the RCN. They oversee the day-to-day operational work of the RCN.

The Council, in comparison, is comprised of elected, non-remunerated members who seek to safeguard the interests of the RCN and its members through performing assurance and oversight functions. The Council seeks assurance from the Executive Team that the RCN is being effectively managed.

The roles of the RCN Council and RCN Executive Team complement, rather than conflict, with each other.

By way of illustration, this table sets out the main differences in roles between the RCN Council and the RCN Executive Team:

Area of focus	RCN Council Role	Executive Team Role
Leadership	Setting the direction and establishing the boundaries for the long term success of the RCN.	Operational and strategic leadership of the operations of the RCN in support of accomplishing its work.
Planning	Providing strategic oversight of 'what' the RCN should be achieving.	Devising strategic operational and tactical plans that set out 'how' the RCN will achieve its goals.
Resource development	Engaging with the wider membership, while keeping the needs and challenges of the RCN in mind.	Establishing and structuring resource development plans and ensuring that the right people and infrastructure is in place to support the goals of the RCN. Engaging with professional stakeholders.
Policy development	Oversee the creation of rules, polices and regulations which establish the RCN's governing policies, by which the Council monitors the RCN.	Create operating policies and procedures that provide direction to the staff as to how to accomplish their work.
Financial responsibility	Seeks assurance from the Executive Team that the financial affairs of the RCN are well managed and signs off on significantly large projects in accordance with the policy on financial signing and approval limits.	Chief Financial Officer, working in collaboration with the Executive Team, has responsibility for budgeting, managing investments and the day-to-day financial management of the RCN.