

Annual General Meeting 2024: Questions and responses

CORPORATE



Contents

This document includes questions asked at the Royal College of Nursing’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Wednesday 17 July 2024.

As well as responses provided at the meeting, together with supplementary information where helpful, it also includes responses to questions which were received before, during, and after the AGM and which were not answered at the meeting itself. We have grouped together questions on similar topics.

If you feel we have missed anything, please let us know by emailing:
governance.support@rcn.org.uk

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Activist Academy

“ An article in the current issue of Nursing Standard on Activism claims that ‘supporting nurses to express their political beliefs through organised activism is the new RCN Activist Academy’s raison d’etre’. Is this an accurate statement and if so, is there any conflict with the RCN tradition of being non-party political?

This is not an accurate statement. The RCN Activism Academy will assist members become more politically aware by educating our members and empowering them to use their voice collectively. That is not contrary to our non-party political stance.



AGM

“ To allow greater engagement and to allow more members to be involved in the AGM, similar to Congress, should it not move around the country?

This is the first time in several years that the AGM has been held in London. Last year it was held in Manchester and in the many years prior to that, with the exception of the AGMs held in the pandemic (which were online), it has been held at Congress, outside of London. For example, in 2018 the AGM was held in Belfast, in 2019 the AGM was in Liverpool and in 2022 it was in Glasgow.

“ It would be appropriate for transparency if we could be told how many members are present at the AGM in total. This would need to be specified for the start of the meeting and after the break we presumably still must be quorate.

This is something we can do from now onwards, although it is important to note that numbers fluctuate during the meeting as people join and leave. The quorum for the AGM is 150 people either in person or by proxy. This means that the proxy votes count towards the quorum. There were some 4,000 proxy votes cast prior to the AGM this year which meant that we knew we would be quorate throughout.

In terms of attendance at the actual meeting this year, there were 75 members present in the room and 425 online.

“ Would this AGM be recorded to play for later?

Yes, the AGM is recorded. It is available for members to view behind the member login on the website.

“ Who from the Executive Team were at the AGM? Were the whole Executive Team there?

The Executive Team, with the exception of the Executive Director for Wales, Helen Whyley, who was on annual leave, were at the AGM. Those present were:

- Professor Nicola Ranger, General Secretary and Chief Executive
- Philip Ball, Chief of Staff
- Rita Devlin, Executive Director, Northern Ireland
- Patricia Marquis, Executive Director, England
- Jo Galbraith-Marten, Executive Director of Legal and Member Relations
- Patricia Mbasani, Chief People Officer
- Colin Poolman, Executive Director, Scotland
- Gush Uppal, Chief Financial Officer
- Natalie Zara, Executive Director of Governance.

Assisted dying

“ I am curious what the RCN position is on assisted dying, and how any work will be supported. Will the work for assisted dying also take into account all of the work needed to work with individuals with learning disabilities and their support as well as the nurses involved in their care? Are Council able to provide reassurance that any ongoing work on the recent Congress resolution on assisted suicide / assisted dying takes into account a wide range of members’ views?

The topic of assisted dying (AD) is highly emotive and involves a range of complex issues, such as ethical, legal, religious and cultural beliefs. As such, there is a plurality of views and opinions within our membership and consequently, like many of the other professional colleges and associations, the RCN has a neutral position on AD. However, we are looking to update this position to reflect a more contemporary and inclusive language that represents the RCN as a UK-wide organisation whilst retaining our neutral stance. Read our position statement here: rcn.org.uk/About-us/Our-Influencing-work/Position-statements/rcn-position-on-assisted-dying

We are aware that AD legislation is being progressed in the different countries of the UK and Crown dependencies, and we are working to influence these to ensure all our members, irrespective of the patient group they are working with, are adequately protected and supported in practice. The College has also commenced the process of updating guidance to further enhance the support to members in relation to AD. The RCN has recently formed a UK-wide steering group to take this work forwards, as well as the identification of an expert reference group that will be primarily made up of members with clinical expertise and experience in this field. If you are interested in becoming part of this work, we would be keen to hear from you.

Awards

“ RCN Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have their own Nursing Awards. Will the RCNi Awards, which have not run this year, be reinstated in future years?

In previous years RCNi have run UK awards which are open to UK members, RCNi are not running their awards this year. We are considering options for all our awards going forward.

Band 5 review

“ While the ongoing band 5 review is a good idea, I’m concerned that managers will not have enough time to go through all of the 75 questions for all band 5 staff. Plus, at the end, there is no guarantee of securing the upgraded post. As ICU nurses, we have completed step competencies and an ICU university module, including years of experience, positioning us as specialist nurses. Given our specialised training, why are we not eligible for advancement to Band 6? In addition, in ARI NHS Grampian people secure ICU band 6 positions through directly applying when band 6 roles are advertised.

The review of band 5 nursing roles was launched in June as part of the review of Agenda for Change and in recognition of the significant growth in the band 5 role specifically.

The review process has been developed in partnership with the employers and government and is based on the NHS job evaluation scheme, whilst the questionnaire does contain 75 questions these are specifically designed to establish the step difference between band 5 and band 6 job evaluations levels and are grouped according to the factors within the NHS Job Evaluation Scheme.

The approach taken and guidance developed for applicants and managers is intended to simplify the job evaluation process and assist in managing the potentially considerable number of review requests. It will be possible for applicants to work together to develop their applications and it is likely that managers will both applications individually and where possible jointly where the specifics of the role allow.

The purpose of the review of band 5 nursing roles is to recognise the growth in the band 5 role and requirements of the job today, specific proficiencies and development understand in relation to the work of many band 5 nurses has not been properly valued and the review provides the opportunity to correct this historical imbalance.

Whilst the review of band 5 nursing roles does present a challenge in terms of capacity, employers, Scottish government, and the trade unions agree and acknowledge the urgent need and support the work. More information is available on our website: rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news/band-5-role-review-170624

Communications

“ We have heard of many great pieces of work and how to access RCN Council, request EGMs etc. But how do members know how to access these? We need better communication even if this is simply a monthly update of policies and standard operating procedures type of information that has been added to the website. How can we improve the type of information that gets to members? ”

Following on from the governance and culture reviews, a substantial piece of work has taken place to completely overhaul all governance-related content on our website.

Our aim is to provide a much more inclusive and transparent hub which will include governance policies and procedures, host elections information and improve the mechanisms by which we get information to members. In addition, there are many ways in which members can keep up to date for example, the weekly update to members, which members can opt in to receive.

Furthermore, Council minutes are available on the website and both the Trade Union Committee and Professional Nursing Committee publish member-facing summaries of the meeting discussions.

Early career

“ I want to know if RCN has any solid plans to strengthen the inclusion of early career nurses and midwives into leadership positions, within RCN for coming years? ”

The development of the RCN Institute of Clinical Excellence continues. The Leadership Academy has begun working on a UK strategy to address the delivery of nurse leadership. Full engagement will be carried out through 2024. The RCN Leadership Forum are supporting this work.



Finance and investments

“ The RCN is growing - both in terms of its finances and its investment portfolio. Is there any plan in the future where the members can benefit by receiving dividends as growth continues?

We do not distribute dividends to members, and we have never done so. Looking forward, our reserves will be utilised to fund significant investments in our buildings and our infrastructure, as well ring-fencing funds for any future industrial action.

“ What proportion of RCN’s annual income is spent on member services and supporting the activities to achieve fair pay?

In 2023 we spent 94% of our annual income on member services, of which £6.8m was spent on *Fair Pay for Nursing* campaigning activities, which was in addition to the £5.4m spent in 2022.

“ As promised at Congress, would it be possible to share the RCN’s specific investment portfolio? What is the RCN’s plan for divestment (both through direct and indirect investments) from companies complicit in global conflict?

Our investment portfolio can now be found on our website: rcn.org.uk/About-us/How-the-RCN-is-governed/Our-governance-documents

Please scroll down the page and click on ‘investments’ to find the Statement of Investment Principles and the Breakdown of the RCN Portfolio 2024.

“ With £200m in cash reserves, we have only spent £200,000 on direct member support for those who are in financial distress. Do we have any plans to increase this funding in the next year?

The £200,000 refers to the direct grants provided to individuals in financial hardship by the RCN Foundation via its Benevolent Service, and not the RCN. The Foundation’s reserves at the end of 2023 were £37m. As a grant-maker, the Foundation needs to have a sufficient level of reserves from which to generate income for its grant-making activities. This ensures that the Foundation can support beneficiaries into the future. In 2026, the direct financial grants that will be awarded will rise by around 3%.

In addition to the direct financial grants that the Foundation provided for members in financial distress in 2023, over 2,100 individuals were also provided with benefits advice by the RCN Foundation Benevolent Service. Individuals who took up the advice were, on average, better off annually by £10,631.

Therefore, the annual total of unclaimed benefits identified by the Benevolent Service for those it supported in 2023, was nearly £22.7m.

Governance

“ How can we make better use of virtual spaces and AI (artificial intelligence) to have meetings/hold Congress and save the money from venue/travels to put it into developmental courses for members and lower membership fees?

When planning meetings, one of the considerations that the Governance Team consider is the use of virtual meeting spaces. Many of our committee meetings are held entirely online or have online attendance options. While there are undoubtedly costs in holding in-person meetings, we must weigh these against the benefits of holding key governance meetings in which all members are physically in the room. For example, learning and development workshops at committee/Council meetings are more effective when done in-person. With regards to Congress, a separate review is about to commence as part of the governance and culture reviews (KPMG and Carr reviews).

Independent sector

“ I am a registered nurse working as an agency nurse in the private sector. I really appreciate the RCN but I feel the private sector is usually left out when it comes to things like salaries and general involvement. Is there a division between NHS and the private sector?

We actively campaign for employment terms and conditions across independent health and social care. The *Council's Report to Members on RCN Congress 2023* included some key information on “Item 15: Pay, terms and conditions parity” and the action taken since this item was on the Congress 2023 agenda. Visit: rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/councils-report-to-members-on-congress-2023 This work continues as part of our role as a trade union representing our members across the various employment sectors for fair pay and improved terms and conditions.

We have a dedicated team of independent health and social care (IHSC) lead nurses working across the UK. Their work includes ensuring agency members are supported. We have specific resources designed for agency workers as well as wider work for all members working across the independent health and social care sector.

Visit: rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/RCN-advice/agency-workers for more information.

Please also see our *Annual Review of the Year 2023*, which includes more information about how we support the independent health and social care sector:

rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/rcn-annual-review-of-the-year-2023-uk-pub-011-052

Legal

“ Why are we not getting support when we require it as nurses? When we have legal case, we are always either asked to resign from our substantial post or we are left to deal with it by ourselves.

RCN Legal Services represents thousands of members each year in relation to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) fitness to practice proceedings or in employment tribunal claims. In relation to Employment Tribunal claims we apply a merits threshold in order to provide support and we can only support members with claims that have a more than reasonable prospects of success that we deem to be 51% and above. The reason we apply this threshold is that it would be disproportionate to utilise membership funds in respect of claims that are likely to fail.

Member resolution

“ This is my first year in UK and the first year as a member of the RCN. I was surprised to hear at the AGM that we have situations where RCN stand against her own members or vice versa. My understanding of union is that it is there to protect, support, guide their own members. My question is what are the circumstances in which RCN can stand against its own members and how are these situations handled? I want to know if there is any document / section that details the process.

We do not stand against its members, but we do have a Member Resolution policy which is available on our website. This policy sets out the process the RCN follows if a member's behaviour is complained about.

Member Support Services

“ In the financial report there is a lot of information around future investment, financial stability, infrastructure and technology development - this being the basis of the membership fees increase. But what about the IENs members who are under stringent immigration rules with no recourse to public funds, many of whom are in financial difficulties? Why are these members not being supported in order to reduce their suffering, preserve their mental health, and prevent them from harm? ”

We have an IEN (internationally educated nurse) toolkit for staff that will enable them to better support our members with the issues they face in the workplace. We also have a dedicated IEN section on our website where members can find a variety of RCN resources including employment advice, immigration advice and member support services such as career advice, welfare advice and counselling.

Any IEN member requiring specific support can also contact RCND and members will be referred to their region and or country for individual representation if required. From a policy perspective we have, and will continue, to lobby the government on any immigration law changes.

Membership

“ Does the RCN have a plan in place to continue to increase membership? As an IENM during my orientation programme to our TRUST, UNISON spoke to and gave out souvenirs to the newly recruited nurses. Does the RCN also have any such (or other) strategy to continue to increase membership? ”

Yes. We undertake a year-round programme of recruitment activities. Our current membership figures are the highest they have ever been and continue to grow. We are about to enter our biggest recruitment phase of the year, the autumn student recruitment phase, and we will be trialling free membership for students in their first year of their nursing degree.

Membership category review

“ **What has happened to the Membership Category Review?**

Following some successful quick wins on membership categories, such as changing the career break membership, this work has transferred to the Governance Committee. The Committee has considered the complexity of the work in a deep dive session and asked for further work to be completed in line with the priorities that Council agreed to when this work moved to the Governance Committee. The next area for their consideration is student nursing associate membership.

Nursing

“ **What action/steps is the RCN taking to support nurses who are transitioning into self-employed or entrepreneurial roles within the health care sector?**

As a trade union, we promote employment rights for workers. In terms of professional nursing resources, we work to ensure that our publications meet the needs of members across all workplace settings. We encourage members to actively participate in RCN activities and join forums. Where particular gaps are identified by members, we have processes in place through forums and their respective committees for members to raise areas they feel more resources are needed.

There is information regarding self-employment on our website:
rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/RCN-advice/self-employment



Strike

“ There are lots of members from the independent sector who could not vote on pay, could this be a reason the threshold was not met?

The statutory ballots we conducted in 2022 and 2023 related to pay in the NHS. Only members employed directly in the NHS and on Agenda for Change contracts were able to vote in the ballot. Members employed in the independent sector were not able to vote in the ballot so that is not the reason why the threshold was not met in the second ballot in 2023.

Students

“ What help will the RCN give to student nurses who now have to make up hours before graduating?

Each individual case that is raised through RCN Advice Team has been supported. Work with members, the universities and the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) has been undertaken to ensure student and academic staff are supported in discussions and actions that are ongoing. We have also gathered survey data from members and will be addressing the feedback actioning work plans to support members generated from the data analysis.

“ Student nurses have been reporting that they are unable to get jobs in some trusts. The trusts seem to be having recruitment freezes, presumably because of debt and funding? A large proportion of the student nurse cohorts are not securing jobs despite the national vacancies in nursing that we are all aware of. Is the RCN aware of these recruitment freezes? Are we asking trusts to open their books and also look into the funding from the integrated care boards?

We have been working with the RCN Student Committee and student ambassadors from across the UK to explore the reports of a reduction in vacancies for students qualifying in 2024. Currently, students have expressed that some trusts are stating that vacancy rates are falling and that students will be required to enter application processes. We have highlighted to employers across health and social care that there needs to be a wider approach to early career nursing opportunities and a longer-term plan to support students' applications to roles. Listening events have been held with students and university leads from across the UK, and these have supported and informed discussions with NHS employers and stakeholders regarding the challenges. Students are encouraged to raise experiences and concerns through RCN Advice Team and with their local ambassadors and committee representatives. Future work will be undertaken to support the universities, employers and integrated care boards to develop resources and webinars to support students with interview and application processing.

**The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes
excellence in practice and shapes health policies**

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