



## RCN Safety and conduct at events policy

**Who does this policy apply to?**

All participants at RCN and external events where funding to attend is provided by the RCN, including, but not limited to, members, delegates, staff, volunteers, speakers, contractors, exhibitors, and sponsors.

**Purpose**

This policy supports the safety of participants at RCN and external Events in relation to conduct and behaviour.

**Document name**

RCN safety and conduct at events policy

**Description of the policy**

The RCN supports and promotes a culture of reciprocal respect and will not tolerate discrimination, harassment or any form of misconduct across all our activities. It sets out the approach to this specifically in relation to RCN events and non RCN events where funding is provided by the RCN. It includes a specific code of conduct for RCN Events as recommended by Bruce Carr KC in his report on the independent review of the culture of the RCN (2022). The policy was developed following recommendations because of incidents at previous RCN events.

**To note:**

- This policy was developed as an RCN policy and first launched in 2023, after approval by RCN Council.
- The policy as it currently stands applies to RCN and external events where members and / or staff are funded by the RCN to attend only.

**Author/s**

Performance, Risk and Assurance Manager

<p><b>Cross Reference</b></p> <p>RCN Respect Charter</p> <p>RCN Code of Conduct for Members:</p> <p>Council, Board and Committee members – fit proper persons criteria (Regulation)</p> <p>Conflicts of interest/gifts and hospitality policy</p> <p>Member resolution policy For Staff:</p> <p>Alcohol and drugs policy</p> <p>Declaring interests policy (including gifts and hospitality policy) (staff)</p> <p>Health &amp; Safety Management Guidance Note: Health &amp; Safety Considerations for Events and Conferences</p> <p>Lone worker policy</p> <p>Managing unacceptable behaviour guidelines</p> <p>Respect at work policy</p> <p>Safeguarding guidance</p> <p>RCN Staff disciplinary Policy</p>
<p><b>Status:</b></p> <p>Light touch review completed April 2025, to develop appendix B.</p> <p>Consulted:</p> <p>Chief of Staff</p> <p>Executive Director of Governance</p> <p>Executive Director of RCN England</p> <p>Executive Director of Legal and Member Relations</p> <p>Associate Director of Complaints and Investigations</p>
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<p>Department responsible for review</p> <p>Governance Department</p>

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VERSION CONTROL		
Title	Change	Date and version
Safety and conduct at RCN events	Appendix B added – clarifies criteria where rooms funded by RCN can be shared. No other changes	July 2025 -v3
Safety and conduct at RCN events	No significant change – minor amendments	April 2024 –v2
Safety and conduct at RCN events	New policy – approved by RCN Council	2023 –v1

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The RCN holds a range of in-person, online and hybrid (in-person and online) events such as conferences, awards ceremonies, talks, seminars, webinars, and workshops. It also holds an annual Congress and General Meetings which are open to all members, as well as small events and meetings at branch and local level. This policy applies to all such events and the definition of events is not limited to those described above.
- 1.2 The RCN is committed to providing a safe environment for all participants. The scope of this policy extends to the safety of participants at events in relation to conduct and behaviour including that of a most serious nature. Other aspects of safety are covered by the *RCN's Health & Safety Management Guidance Note: Health & Safety Considerations for Events and Conferences*, as well as broader health and safety policy and legislation.
- 1.3 The RCN supports and promotes a culture of reciprocal respect and will not tolerate discrimination, harassment or any form of misconduct across all our activities. This policy sets out the approach to this specifically in relation to events.
- 1.4 The policy applies to all participants in RCN events including, but not limited to, delegates, members, staff, volunteers, speakers, contractors, exhibitors, and sponsors. The word "participant" is used throughout this policy as an inclusive term for the sake of brevity. The policy also applies where the RCN has funded accommodation at external events.

## 2 PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 The RCN's three guiding principles in relation to conduct and behaviour are:
  - 2.1.1 that all participants are kept safe, treated with respect and without disadvantage, and behave accordingly to others.
  - 2.1.2 anyone who needs to report any incident relating to conduct and behaviour which, in their sincere belief, breaches the above is given suitable means of doing so, is listened to in good faith and their report treated seriously.
  - 2.1.3 action taken shall be appropriate and proportionate should anyone be found to have behaved towards others inappropriately.
- 2.2 The expected standard is as indicated in the RCN Respect Charter and this policy.
- 2.3 All event arrangements will ensure that the above principles are adhered to. Offsite events are considered an extension of the RCN workplace, and all associated activities and behaviours must align with this – see section 3.1 below.

### 3 RCN RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1 Events and associated activities (such as site visits and travel to and from events) at RCN or external locations are subject to all RCN policies and regulations along with venue policies.
- 3.2 As part of our responsibilities in organising and running events, as well as the conduct and behaviour issues covered in section 4 below, the RCN will also ensure that the following aspects are covered:
- 3.2.1 Planning – plans for the event will consider how to deal with conduct, behaviour, and the safety of participants in an appropriate way for the event. Plans will always include a mechanism for reporting complaints or incidents (see section 6 below).
  - 3.2.2 Roles and responsibilities – within such plans, the roles of participants are clearly stated. It includes those who are designated as being available to deal with complaints and incident reporting (see sections 5 and 6 below).
  - 3.2.3 Co-ordination with external parties – this includes venue management to ensure arrangements are clear in respect of the safety and conduct of all participants.
  - 3.2.4 Clear communication and provision of proportionate information to all participants, including documentation and briefings, to ensure all are fully aware of arrangements and responsibilities including responsibilities which fall under this policy.
  - 3.2.5 Monitoring and reporting on events, leading to reflection/review, and implementing improvements to enable the best possible event experience for all participants.
  - 3.2.6 Risk assessment – ensuring that all risks associated with the event are properly assessed and appropriately mitigated. In order to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of RCN members and RCN members of staff, rooms funded or provided by the RCN must not be shared except in specific circumstances, where approval has been granted by the relevant RCN Director, see appendix B.
  - 3.2.7 Equality impact assessed, the event’s impact on those with protected characteristics in equality legislation is accurately assessed, and reasonable adjustments are put in place accordingly. The circumstances listed in appendix B will ensure that the RCN complies with legislation.
  - 3.2.8 Ensure the RCN’s position on alcohol is clearly understood – as part of our responsibilities to provide a safe environment, the RCN

policy is that the RCN will not purchase alcohol for participants. For example, there will be no provision by the RCN for alcoholic drinks at receptions or dinners. This position will be clearly communicated as and when necessary.

- 3.2.9 Consent -consent of participants to being filmed, photographed, or recorded must be obtained beforehand. This can be done by use of appropriate notices in communications prior to and during the event. Participants will be asked to inform the organisers if they do not wish to be filmed, recorded, or photographed. Speakers at events will be invited to provide consent, at the point of invitation.
- 3.2.10 Incident/complaints reporting –ensure incidents and complaints reporting measures are in place and there is a clear process for reporting at the event.

## 4 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR RCN EVENTS

- 4.1 Conduct is key to ensuring the safety of all participants as well as the reputation of the RCN.
- 4.2 All participants should always behave in a courteous and respectful manner towards others in both social and professional settings at events.
- 4.3 Participants should abide by the RCN Respect Charter and the RCN Code of Conduct.
- 4.4 If appropriate, participants should also remember their requirement to adhere to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) or other professional regulators' Code of Conduct, the RCN Regulation on Fit and Proper Persons, the RCN Foundation Code of Conduct for Volunteers. Sponsors and exhibitors, if applicable, are reminded of their obligations under the Association of British Pharmaceuticals (ABPI) Code of Practice.
- 4.5 The RCN takes a zero-tolerance approach to unacceptable behaviour, incivilities and poor conduct at its events including:
  - 4.5.1 engaging in unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating another person's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile or degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.
  - 4.5.2 offensive or undermining comments or non-verbal behaviours related to personal characteristics and lifestyle choices.
  - 4.5.3 excessive consumption of alcohol or other intoxicants leading to professional and appropriate boundaries and behaviours not being maintained.

- 4.5.4 inappropriate physical contact and unwelcome sexual attention (physically, verbally or in writing).
- 4.5.5 stalking/following that also includes, continued communication after a request to cease doing so.
- 4.5.6 harassing photography or recording.
- 4.5.7 sustained disruption and noise.
- 4.5.8 display of sexual or offensive imagery or materials, use of sexualised clothing/uniform/costume, use of sexual references, or otherwise creation of a sexualised environment.
- 4.5.9 threats or incitements of violence.
- 4.5.10 publication of confidential or sensitive information about other people present or not.
- 4.5.11 consumption or possession of illegal narcotics of any form under any circumstances.
- 4.5.12 behaviour which compromises health and safety arrangements, putting self and others at risk.
- 4.5.13 conduct which may seem harmless, well-meant, or humorous but which is not taken as such by others and their objections not respected.
- 4.5.14 deliberate and persistent pressure on staff to “bend rules” or “make exceptions” in policies such as the Expenses policy, for no valid reason.
- 4.6 Participants who are asked to stop any of the above behaviours (or others not listed) are expected to comply immediately. If they do not, then the actions outline in section 5 may apply.
- 4.7 Inappropriate conduct towards venue staff/representatives or members of the public at an RCN event will not be tolerated. Participants should also respect the policies related to a venue on safety and conduct.
- 4.8 Behaviour by participants during travel to and from a venue and at site visits is subject to this policy.



## 5. CONSEQUENCES OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

5.1 The following is a list of actions which may be taken due to breaches of the Code of Conduct for RCN Events.

- 5.1.1 immediate verbal and/or written warning (templates for written warnings are available in the RCN's *Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Guidelines*).
- 5.1.2 removal of some or all event privileges (e.g., attendance at social events).
- 5.1.3 banning from any sessions for the remainder of the event at which the alleged offender and the person reporting would both be present.
- 5.1.4 immediate expulsion from the event with (where applicable) no refund.
- 5.1.5 immediate cessation of an event session if the incident is associated with it (e.g. if inappropriate/offensive material is presented as part of the session or disruption takes place during a session).
- 5.1.6 referral to mediation or other processes to achieve a joint outcome.
- 5.1.7 escalation of the matter for consideration to the RCN's complaints process for further investigation or straight to internal disciplinary measures or member resolution processes, if the offender is an RCN employee or member (noting that further sanctions such as barring from all future RCN events or removal from membership may be applied).
- 5.1.8 escalation of the matter to another authority, e.g. regulator or the police.

## 6 MANAGING INCIDENTS, COMPLAINTS AND INCIDENT REPORTING

- 6.1 RCN staff at events must ensure they are familiar with the *RCN Guidelines on managing unacceptable behaviour* plus any advice or guidance which relates specifically to the event.
- 6.2 All complaints and incidents at an event (including events such as branch meetings where a member of staff is not present at the time) should be reported to a member of RCN staff and investigated as soon as possible.
- 6.3 It is important that when incidents and/or complaints occur between two or more parties all those involved are listened to as part of the initial

assessment of the situation and that everyone's perspective is acknowledged and recorded.

- 6.4 For larger events, a staff member should be specifically designated to be responsible for handling complaints and incidents; those individuals should be properly supported and trained as appropriate. Their role will be to ensure that complaints and incidents are recorded, to undertake initial investigation, and to escalate the management of them appropriately if it is necessary.
- 6.5 The escalation process itself will vary from event to event depending on the scale of the event. The important thing is to ensure that there is one and that it is adhered to.
- 6.6 Incidents should be reported either via the Accident and Incident reporting form (on the RCN intranet and in the *RCN's Managing unacceptable behaviour guidelines*) or on a form designed specifically for that event.
- 6.7 Complaints should be reported to the RCN's Customer Relations Manager who will record the complaint and the actions taken.
- 6.8 A draft template for a complaints and incident form is included in Appendix A of this document below.
- 6.9 Participants at an event, other than staff, can also use the RCN's complaints and feedback process on the RCN website.
- 6.10 The person making the complaint and/or reporting an incident should be advised to keep the information confidential until RCN staff have had sufficient time to investigate and address the situation. This is as much for their safety and protection as it is for other participants.
- 6.11 The person making the complaint and/or reporting the incident should be encouraged to report it regardless of whether the alleged offender is a participant at the event or external, such as a venue representative. The individual might be subject to the conduct policies of other organisations, but the RCN would want to work with all bodies associated with the event to address issues of conduct.
- 6.12 If required staff should assist in completing the form and collecting information and provide a quiet place to do so.
- 6.13 Depending on the immediate circumstances and following initial investigation, the staff member/s dealing with complaints and incidents on site should decide whether other parties, e.g., security staff or the police, should also be notified. Where appropriate such referrals will be made in discussion with the person making the complaint or reporting the incident. However, depending on circumstances the staff member might need to make the referral themselves.

- 6.14 Staff should also compile their own report on actions taken. Where possible, the alleged offender should be contacted, and their response noted in the report. That person may also wish to make a separate report or complete an incident form with their version of events and should be offered the opportunity to do so.
- 6.15 If staff need to take any of the actions as listed in section 5.1 above, the report should note the alleged offender's response, including any refuting of the allegation or appeal against the decision made. Depending on the circumstances and details of the incident, and in the interests of fairness and transparency, it may not be possible to withhold names.
- 6.16 If the incident relates to a young person or vulnerable adult, staff should refer to the *RCN's Safeguarding guidance*.
- 6.17 Complaint and Incident reports will be stored as confidential documents by the RCN's Associate Director of Complaints and Investigations / Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager in line with normal document retention policies.
- 6.18 All complaints, incidents and resulting action taken must also be reported to the Executive Team member responsible for the event as soon as possible.

## **7 COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**

- 7.1 All parties aware of the incident should be informed that it has been reported and action taken, while respecting the privacy of individuals concerned and keeping revealing details to a minimum.
- 7.2 Depending on the nature of the incident and its aftermath, a senior officer of the event may wish to make an announcement, for example, as part of a closing plenary. While (as advised above) details and identities are to be kept confidential, rumours and hearsay can spread quickly so it may be prudent to make a discretionary announcement that an incident occurred, and appropriate action taken. Such an announcement should only be made by a suitably senior figure such as a conference chair or equivalent, or someone with delegated authority.

Appendix A – Complaints and Incident reporting form template for use at RCN events

Name of complainant or person affected by the incident:	
Contact details:	
Date:	
Descriptions of complaint/incident:	
Witness/es (include name and contact details).	
Description of what they witnessed:	
Name and role of person dealing with complaint/incident:	
Contact details:	
Action taken:	
Has the complaint/incident been logged? Y/N (explain where it has been logged)	
Was the complaint/incident reported to someone else? If so, please describe who and how it was reported:	

## Appendix B

The RCN is committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all attending RCN events and is keen to ensure that RCN events are as inclusive and equitable as possible.

The RCN's policy position is that rooms must not be shared;

- at RCN funded / part funded events,
- at non RCN events. Where the RCN is funding accommodation

Exceptions may be made, with the approval of the relevant RCN Director

- Where the person sharing the room funded or provided by the RCN (fully or part funded) is the spouse, partner, carer (*for example childcare, including children attending the event with their parent due to breastfeeding, disability assistance is covered below*) or close family member(s) of the RCN member allocated to the room. In these circumstances, the person to whom the room is allocated **MUST** bear any additional costs such as taxi fares or room upgrades or hotel expenses and pay these directly themselves. The RCN is not responsible for any additional costs. For example, where a single occupancy room is changed to double occupancy or additional breakfast charges are incurred.
- Where the person sharing the room that will be funded or provided by the RCN (fully or part funded) has a disability and requires disability assistance from another person/carer. In these circumstances, please contact your country/regional office or forums contact for further discussion about your requirements at the RCN event/or funding provided by the RCN for an external event.
- Where the RCN is funding or providing a room to an award winner at an awards event at which the RCN is also funding a guest of their choice. In these circumstances, the RCN would fund any additional costs incurred related to the guest. For example, the annual RCN Awards Ceremony or Nurse of the Year.

If the scenario does not fall within this list of circumstances, the person requesting the room must be advised that the policy position is that room sharing is not permissible. If they wish to bring a friend, they or the friend will need to book and pay for a separate hotel room themselves.