

RCN Congress - policy and process document

1. Definition and purpose of Congress

1.1 Congress is the annual representative meeting of members which focusses on influencing the policy and future direction of the College (RCN Royal Charter)

1.2 Its purpose is to:

- promote the objects of the RCN as laid down in the Royal Charter
- promote the profession of nursing
- express views and opinions on matters of importance to nurses and the nursing profession
- express views and opinions, and influence the health and social care services the nursing profession provides to the people of the United Kingdom
- express views and opinions, and influence health care policy for the people of the United Kingdom
- be involved in international matters relating to nurses, nursing and health care
- to exert political pressure to further these aims
- participate in and influence the policy-making agenda of Council
- express views and opinions, and influence the organisation of the RCN
- recommend action by Council or its committees and boards
- initiate immediate action subject to the agreement of Council members present and meeting in formal session
- provide a variety of educational opportunities for nurses
- facilitate membership networking.

2. When will Congress be held?

2.1 A meeting of RCN Congress will be held at least once in every calendar year. It is the responsibility of the Chief Executive & General Secretary to give at least 28 clear days' notice of the date, time and place of the meeting.

3. Who can attend Congress?

- 3.1 All RCN members (nurse members, nursing support worker member and student members in any payment plan), have the right to attend and speak on any matter before Congress.
- 3.2 RCN members employed by the RCN at the time Congress takes place are permitted to speak at the invitation of the Chair.

4. Who can submit items for the agenda?

- 4.1 Any member can submit items to be considered for inclusion on the Congress agenda on behalf of the entities listed below:

- Boards
- Branches
- Council
- Forums
- Nursing Support Workers Committee
- Learning Representatives Committee
- RCN Professional Nursing Committee
- RCN Trade Union Committee
- Safety Representatives Committee
- Stewards Committee
- Students Committee

However, each submission should be authorised from one of the following officers from the relevant submitting entity:

- the chair, vice chair, secretary, convenor or treasurer of a branch
- a forum committee member
- the chair or vice chair of the UK Stewards' Committee, UK Safety Representatives' Committee or UK Learning Representatives' Committee
- the chair or vice chair of the RCN Students' Committee, or the student member of Council
- the chair and vice chair of the Nursing Support Workers Committee or the Nursing Support Workers member of Council
- a board chair or vice chair
- the Chair or Vice Chair of Council
- the Chair or Vice Chair of the Professional Nursing Committee or Trade Union Committee.

In addition, the Chief Executive & General Secretary may submit items in order to facilitate the business of Congress.

5. Who can vote?

- 5.1 Only members of the following representative bodies can vote at Congress, as follows:
- Branches are represented on the basis of one vote for every 1000 members or part thereof.
 - Forums are represented on the basis of one vote for every 1000 members or part thereof.
 - Nursing Support Workers have seven votes.
 - Learning Representatives have seven votes.
 - Safety Representatives have seven votes.
 - Stewards have seven votes.
 - Students have seven votes
- 5.2 Members may only vote on behalf of one of the above entities at any one time.
- 5.3 The registration process for Congress identifies who is voting on behalf of which entity during the mornings and afternoons of each day. If voting members change after the initial registration it is the responsibility of the voting entity to ensure that a) the individual voting members are aware of the change and b) to ensure that the registration team are properly notified of the change.
- 5.4 Members of Governance bodies, ie Council, Boards and the RCN Professional Nursing and Trade Union Committees are not entitled to vote. The purpose of their role at Congress is to listen to the views of members in order to inform effective decision-making. Where Board members hold a dual role – for example they are on a board and are also voting on behalf of their branch they must declare this as a conflict of interest when they register to vote. Council and the Professional Nursing and Trade Union Committee Members cannot vote on behalf of their branch, or forum, or representative committee.
- 5.5 The Chair, Vice Chair of Congress and members of the Agenda Committee cannot vote (except that the Chair of Congress has a casting vote in the event of a second equality of votes).
- 5.6 Any member employed by the RCN at the time of Congress is not entitled to vote.

6. Allocation of voting places and funding to attend Congress

- 6.1 The process for allocating voting places and the associated funding arrangements are set out in a separate policy and process document.

7. The role of Council and Officers of the meeting

- 7.1 Council hosts Congress and remains in session throughout the week. Council makes the key decisions on Congress including the dates and location of Congress.
- 7.2 Council also agrees the agenda and programme, on the recommendation of the Agenda Committee.
- 7.3 Congress is presided over by the Chair and Vice Chair of Congress. The Chair of Congress is a non-voting member of RCN Council – this is because he/she is elected by the representative bodies rather than being directly elected by the membership as required for a trade union executive voting member under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
- 7.4 The role and remit of the Chair and Vice Chair of Congress are set out in role descriptors.
- 7.5 The Agenda Committee is elected by the representative bodies at Congress. Its role and purposes is set out in its terms of reference.
- 7.6 The rules for the election of the Chair and Vice Chair and the Agenda Committee are set out in election procedures for these roles which are agreed by RCN Council in advance of an election year.
- 7.7 Should a mid-term vacancy arise for any of these roles the RCN's process for filling casual vacancies applies.
- 7.8 Terms of office are of two years duration and the RCN's regulation (agreed by Council in July 2014) on terms of office applies to these roles.

8. Management and rules of the meeting

- 8.1 The Chair of Congress is responsible for the conduct of the meeting. If s/he is absent the Vice Chair will assume his/her role. If both are absent the Agenda

Committee may elect one from amongst themselves to assume the role of Chair.

9. Quorum

9.1 One hundred and fifty voting members must be present for the meeting to be quorate.

10. Order of business

10.1 The times of starting and adjourning each session will be set out in the order of business. Once the programme has been published the order and timing of business can only be varied by agreement of the Agenda Committee.

11. Auditorium arrangements

11.1 Seating arrangements will be detailed in the Congress brochure, and members should ensure they are seated in the correct area. Distribution of papers and publications in the debating hall is not permitted without the permission of the Chair.

12. Agenda Items – proposing and seconding

12.1 Once the agenda has been published items can only be withdrawn with the agreement of a majority of voting members.

12.2 Resolutions and matters for discussion should be proposed by a voting member from the body which submitted it. In addition, resolutions should be seconded by a voting member from a different body, as defined in paragraph section 4 above.

12.3 In the absence of a proposer from the body which submitted the item, a voting member from another-body may propose it instead.

12.4 Agenda items put forward by Council, the Professional Nursing Committee, Trade Union committee, and country and regional boards would normally be proposed by the Chair of those entities or by another member from those entities.

12.5 Members of Council, the Professional Nursing Committee, Trade Union committee, and country and regional boards may also propose or second items put forward by any other submitting entity if required (for example in the absence of a proposer from the body which submitted it).

12.6 Agenda items submitted by the Chief Executive & General Secretary would normally be proposed by themselves and, if a resolution, seconded by either a voting member from the entities listed in paragraph 5 or a member of Council, Trade Union Committee, Professional Nursing Committee or country/regional board.

12.7 The proposer (and seconder) will set the scene for the ensuing debate, and may therefore present different facets of the arguments for and against the item.

13. Agenda items – voting and summing up

13.1 Resolutions will require a majority of voting members to be carried; there will be no vote on matters for discussion.

13.2 At the conclusion of debate on a resolution or matter for discussion the proposer will have the right of reply. The right of reply is to sum up and clarify points raised in the debate. New information must not be introduced.

13.3 Agenda items – the difference between resolutions and matters for discussion

Resolutions require a vote on an issue, and often include a call for action; matters for discussion highlight issues of importance but do not require a vote.

13.4 Agenda items – emergency items

Emergency agenda items refer to an issue that has arisen since the closing date for the receipt of agenda items. They may be submitted to the Agenda Committee at any time after the closing date for agenda items - either before or during the course of Congress. The Agenda Committee considers each submission during their meetings at Congress and decide whether to recommend that they are included on the agenda. The voting members present at the next session of Congress must vote in favour of an item being accepted on to the agenda.

13.5 Emergency agenda items can only be submitted by those bodies defined in section 4 above and the rules in Section 12 apply to proposing and seconding emergency items.

13.6 Emergency items may also be submitted from the floor of Congress during the meeting itself.

13.7 All emergency agenda items will require the agreement of a majority of voting members in order to be accepted onto the agenda.

14. Agenda items – amendments

14.1 An agenda item may be amended by a proposal which removes, adds or replaces words. An amendment must not change an agenda item so that its original purpose is lost and should only be made to aid clarity.

14.2 Amendments should, whenever possible, be submitted in writing to the Agenda Committee in advance of Congress or during the course of Congress. Amendments may also be proposed from the floor, using a Procedural Item card.

14.3 The Chair will decide whether the amendment is relevant and whether it should be put to the vote.

14.4 An amendment must be proposed by a voting member, and seconded by a voting member from a different body. To be accepted, an amendment will require the agreement of a majority of voting members.

14.5 Once an amendment has been proposed and seconded, no further amendments can be proposed until the vote on that amendment has been taken. Once an amendment has been accepted, the agenda item is amended immediately and replaces the previous version.

15. Agenda Items - voting

15.1 The voting method is determined in advance of Congress each year.

15.2 A simple majority is required for a vote to be passed.

15.3 In the case of an equality of votes, a second vote will immediately be taken. If there is still an equality of votes, the Chair will have a casting vote.

16. Time Limits

16.1 The time for debating an agenda item will be 25 minutes including procedural items. Proposers of agenda items will be allocated 5 minutes. All subsequent speakers, including seconders, on an agenda item will be allocated 2 minutes.

Persons invited by the Chair to provide supplementary information will be allocated 5 minutes. The proposer of any agenda item will be allocated 2 minutes for the right of reply.

- 16.2 Voting members may propose a variation to time limits using a procedural item card. This must be seconded by a voting member from a different representative body. To be passed, the variation of time limits will require the agreement of a majority of voting members.
- 16.3 The Chair may, exceptionally, grant an extension, or reduction, of time to an individual. The Chair may also extend or reduce the total debating time.

17. Procedural Items

- 17.1 Procedural Item cards may only be used by voting members registered to vote during that session. The Chair will recognise the procedural item card at an appropriate time, and will decide whether a procedural item is put to the vote. The Chair may ask the proposer of the procedural item to clarify the reasons for its introduction, and will take into consideration views from the floor.
- 17.2 A procedural item must be proposed by a voting member and seconded by a voting member from a different body. To be passed, a procedural item will require the agreement of a majority of those voting.
- 17.3 Procedural items should be used for:
- **Proceeding to next business** – however before a vote is taken, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the procedural item. If the procedural item is passed, the proposer has a right of reply to the agenda item. Discussion on the agenda item then ends immediately. No vote is taken on the agenda item. If lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.
 - **Requesting that the vote is taken immediately** – however, before the vote is taken, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the procedural item. The vote on the procedural item is then taken. If passed, the proposer has a right of reply to the agenda item. Discussion on the agenda item then ends immediately, and the vote on the agenda item is taken. If lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.

- **Adjourning the debate** - before a vote is taken to adjourn the debate, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the item. The vote on the procedural item is then taken. If passed, the current debate is then adjourned, to be concluded at a later time during Congress. If lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.
- **Referring the agenda item to Council for further consideration** - before a vote is taken, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the item. The vote on the procedural item is then taken. If passed, the proposer of the agenda item has a right of reply to the agenda item. Debate then stops and the agenda item is referred to Council for further consideration. If lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.
- **Changing the order of agenda items** - before a vote is taken on the procedural item, the proposer of the procedural item must specify the new order of agenda items. If passed, the new order of agenda items will take effect. If lost, the order of agenda items remains unchanged.

18. Points Of Order

- 18.1 A point of order card is used to challenge the conduct of the meeting, or to seek clarification from the Chair. As soon as the Chair sees a point of order card, anyone speaking may be interrupted.
- 18.2 Point of order cards may be used by anyone who is registered and attending Congress.

19. Speaking

- 19.1 Speakers will first state their name and whether they are attending that session as a voting member, or as a non-voting member. If they are attending as a voting member they should say which body they are from.
- 19.2 Members must declare if they are a Council or Board member and be aware of potential conflicts of interest. Council and Board members must ensure that they abide by decisions corporate of Council or their Board.
- 19.3 Likewise Agenda Committee members must declare who they are and be aware of potential conflicts of interest.

19.4 All speakers will address their remarks to the Chair. The Chair may ask speakers who come up to the microphone repeatedly or are not making a contribution to give priority to first time speakers.

20. Reporting from Congress

20.1 All members who register to attend Congress will receive:

- a report on action taken on items debated the previous year. If the item was defeated the report will state so and explain that no action was taken. A report on matters for discussion will only be included if there is ongoing RCN work on that particular issue – where this isn't the case the report will say so.

20.2 Members may ask questions on the report of Council, but a continuation of the previous year's debates will not be allowed. If Congress feels that an item from a previous year is of such importance that it requires further debate, then it should be submitted as a draft emergency agenda item for consideration by the Agenda Committee.

20.3 Members are reminded that the AGM is an opportunity to ask questions about the running of the organisation – from 2014 the AGM is held during Congress week.

21. Agenda Committee Reports

21.1 The Agenda Committee will report regularly in the following ways:

- The First Report, covering all meetings of the Committee since the last Congress, will be disseminated ahead of Congress.
- The Second Report, arising from the Agenda Committee meeting immediately before Congress, will be presented following consideration of the first report.
- Subsequent reports from meetings during Congress will be presented at appropriate times throughout the week.

Agreed and approved by RCN Council, December 2015

Reviewed and updated by RCN Council July 2017, July 2018, November 2018

Amended to reflect the change of name from Health Practitioners to Nursing Support Workers agreed by members at the AGM on 20 May 2019.