Royal College of Nursing

Who does this policy apply to? All RCN members.
Purpose To define the purpose of Congress as the annual representative meeting of RCN members
Description of the policy This policy outlines how RCN Congress works
Author/s Executive Director of Governance
Cross Reference Elections Procedure for Chair and Vice Chair of Congress
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VERSION CONTROL		
Title	Change	Date and version
	• Paragraph 12.1 changed to 'Once an item has	4 February 2026,v6.0

	been accepted on the agenda, an item can only be withdrawn with the agreement of a majority of voting members' so it explicitly covers the items accepted onto the agenda in January and the emergency items accepted during Congress. • Paragraph 12.3 amended to cover the scenario in which both the proposer and seconder withdrawn but members do not agree the withdrawal. • Paragraph 14.5 amended to make it clear that a proposer of an original item may not propose of second a procedural item related to that item. • Paragraph 13.7 amended to allow the Agenda Committee to decide the timinig of emergency items. • Paragraph 13.10 added to make clear the role of Council in the process for accepting an emergency submission onto the agenda. • Paragraph 17.6 amended to make it clear that when a matter for discussion or resolution is 'flipped' a seconder is required. • Requesting that a debate is extended is not included in the list of procedural items at section 17. • Paragraph 13.3 has been amended to remove the right of the Chair to allow a procedural item after	

	the right of reply has concluded. • A definition of 'procedural item' is now included in the policy.	
	• Triage system for procedural items and points of order • Clarity on terms of office end dates for Chair and Vice Chair of Congress • Members of Governance bodies not being able to propose or second items put forward by anotehr submitting entity • Chair of Congress to read out matter for discussion/resolution title for items in the absence of submitting entities to avoid delays • Agenda Committee to determine when on the agenda emergency items will be taken • Clarifies that Chair of Congress can propose emergency resolution agenda items be referred directly to Council. • Time limit for debates • Clarity on who can submit procedural items	January 2025, v5.0
Congress Policy and Process	Updated to reflect change of name from Health Practitioners to Nursing Support Workers, agreed by AGM, May 2019	May 2019, v4.0
Congress Policy and Process		July 2018, v3.0, approved by Council
Congress Policy and Process		July 2017, v2.0, approved by Council
Congress Policy and Process	New policy 1.0	December 2015. 1.0, approved by Council

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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 after meeting in formal session
- provide a variety of educational opportunities for nurses
- facilitate membership networking.

2. When will Congress be held?

2.1 As per the Royal Charter, Congress is the annual representative meeting of Members. It is the responsibility of the General Secretary and Chief Executive 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 members, retired members 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 of Congress and with an appropriate declaration.

4. Who can submit items for the agenda?

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

- Country and Regional Boards
- Branches
- Council
- Forums
- Nursing Support Workers Committee
- RCN Professional Nursing Committee
- RCN Trade Union Committee
- Students Committee
- UK Health and Safety Representatives Committee
- UK Learning Representatives Committee
- UK Stewards Committee

However, each submission must be authorised from one of the following key governance role holders from the relevant submitting entity:

- the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, or Treasurer of a Branch
- a Forum Steering Committee Member
- the Chair or Vice-Chair of the UK Stewards' Committee, UK Health and Safety Representatives' Committee or UK Learning Representatives' Committee
- the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Students' Committee, or the

student member of Council
- the Chair or 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 General Secretary and Chief Executive 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.
- The Nursing Support Worker Committee has seven votes.
- The UK Learning Representatives Committee has seven votes.
- The UK Health and Safety Representatives Committee has seven votes.
- The UK Stewards Committee has seven votes.
- The Students Committee has 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 debates in the morning and afternoon sessions 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, i.e. 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 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 and 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 guidance document.

7. The role of Council and Officers of the meeting

7.1 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 they are 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.

7.2 Council hosts Congress and remains in session throughout the week. Council makes the key decisions on Congress including the dates and location of Congress.

7.3 Council also agrees the agenda and programme, on the recommendation of the Agenda Committee.

7.4 The role and remit of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Congress are set out in individual role descriptors.

7.5 The Agenda Committee is elected by the representative bodies at Congress. Its role and purpose is set out in its terms of reference.

7.6 The rules for the election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Congress 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 for two consecutive Congresses and the RCN's regulation (agreed by Council in July 2019) on terms of office applies to these roles. The Chair of Congress is an ex-officio non-voting member of Council.

7.9 The Chair and Vice-Chair of Congress must relinquish these roles at the end of the term of office for the role, or if, for whatever reason, they cease to be a member of the Agenda Committee.

8. Management and rules of the meeting

8.1 The Chair of Congress is responsible for the conduct of the meeting ensuring the meeting is run effectively, efficiently and to time. If they are absent the Vice-Chair will assume their 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 all debating sessions 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 agenda has been published the order and timing of business can only be varied by the 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. Non-voting members must not sit in seating allocated for voting members. 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 an item has been accepted onto the agenda, an item can only be withdrawn with the agreement of a majority of voting members.

12.2 Resolutions and matters for discussion must be proposed by a voting member from the entity which submitted it. In addition, resolutions need to be seconded by a voting member from a different entity, as defined in paragraph section 4 above. NB. Members of Council, the Professional Nursing Committee, the Trade Union Committee and Country and Regional Boards are non-voting members.

12.3 In the absence of a proposer from the entity which submitted the item, the Chair of Congress will read out the matter for discussion or resolution headline. In the absence of the seconder, the Chair of Congress will ask for the item to be formally seconded from the floor by a voting member.

12.4 Agenda items put forward by Council, the Professional Nursing Committee, Trade Union committee, and Country and Regional Boards should normally be proposed by the Chair of those entities or by another member from those entities. In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair should propose the item and in the absence of either, a member from that

entity should propose the item. If no-one from the submitting entity is available, the Chair of Congress will read out the matter for discussion or resolution headline.

12.5 Agenda items submitted by the General Secretary and Chief Executive should normally be proposed by themselves. If the General Secretary and Chief Executive is not available, the Chair of Congress will read the matter for discussion or resolution headline. Resolutions must be 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.

12.6 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 No procedural items relating to the subject of that matter for discussion or resolution may be brought after the right of reply has concluded.

13.4 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.

13.5 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 decides whether to recommend that they are included on the agenda. The voting members present at the next session of Congress must vote in favour for an item to be accepted on to the agenda.

13.6 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.

13.7 Emergency items may also be submitted from voting members from the floor of Congress during the meeting itself although the preference is for these to be submitted via the emergency submissions process to avoid disrupting the meeting. If accepted the timing of these will be decided by the Agenda Committee.

13.8 All emergency agenda items, whether submitted to and approved by the Agenda Committee, or brought from the floor will require the agreement of a majority of voting members in order to be accepted onto the agenda. The Agenda Committee will determine when on the agenda emergency items will be taken.

13.9 In exceptional circumstances, the Chair of Congress may propose that an emergency resolution agenda item is referred directly to Council without debate. In these instances, it will require the agreement of a majority of voting members to refer the item directly to Council.

13.10 In certain circumstances, Council may decide not to include an emergency item on the agenda where is has been accepted by the Agenda Committee.

14. Agenda items – amendments

14.1 An agenda item may be amended by a proposal which removes, adds or replaces words. However, an amendment must not change an agenda item to the extent 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. In exceptional circumstances, amendments may also be proposed from the floor, using a Procedural Item card and following the procedural item process (at point 17).

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 entity. To be accepted, an amendment will require the agreement of a majority of voting members. NB: Members of Council, the Professional Nursing Committee, the Trade Union Committee and Country and Regional Boards are non-voting members.

14.5 Voting members from the entity that proposed the original item (whether they are the proposer themselves or another voting member from that entity), are not eligible to propose or second an amendment.

14.6 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 30 minutes consisting of:

- 5 minutes allocated to proposers of agenda items,
- 2 minutes allocated to seconders,
- 5 minutes allocated to persons invited by the Chair to provide supplementary information (where required),
- 2 minutes allocated to any other speaker.
- Any procedural items – these are included in the 30 minutes and reduces time for debate.
- 2 minutes allocated to the proposer for the right of reply.

16.2 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.

16.3 Where there is no more time for an accepted agenda item to be discussed, this will be referred directly to Council for consideration without a further vote.

17. Procedural Items & Process

17.1 A procedural item is a request to change or vary the business of Congress.

17.2 Procedural Item cards may only be used by voting members registered to vote during that session.

17.3 Voting members registered to vote during that session who wish to raise a procedural item must in the first instance speak to a member of the Agenda Committee at their desk in the main hall. The members of the Agenda Committee will ask the proposer of the procedural item to clarify the reasons for its introduction to ensure it meets the criteria of a procedural item. If it does meet the criteria, the proposer will be asked to approach the stated microphone in the main hall.

17.4 The Chair will recognise the procedural item card at an appropriate time and will decide whether a procedural item is put to the vote and will take into consideration views from the floor.

17.5 A procedural item must be proposed by a voting member and seconded

by a voting member from a different entity (not a voting member from the proposing entity (see paragraph 12.2). To be passed, a procedural item will require the agreement of a majority of those voting. NB: Members of Council, the Professional Nursing Committee, the Trade Union Committee and Country and Regional Boards are non-voting members.

17.6 Procedural items should be used for:

- Proceeding to next business – voting members may submit a procedural item card requesting that the meeting proceeds to the next agenda item. However before a procedural item vote is taken, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the procedural item. A vote is then taken and 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 the procedural item vote is lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.

- Requesting that the vote is taken immediately – voting members may submit a procedural item card requesting that a vote on an agenda item shall be taken immediately. However, before a procedural item 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 procedural item vote on the agenda item is taken. If the procedural item vote is lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.
- Adjourning the debate - voting members may submit a procedural item card requesting that the debate is adjourned. However before a procedural item vote is taken to adjourn the debate, 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 current debate is adjourned, to be concluded at a later time during Congress. If the procedural item vote is lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.

- Referring the agenda item to Council for further consideration – voting members may submit a procedural item card requesting that the agenda item be referred to Council for further consideration. However, before a procedural item 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 of the agenda item has a right of reply to the procedural item. Debate then stops and the agenda item is referred to Council for further consideration. If the procedural item vote is lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.

- Changing the order of agenda items – voting members may submit a procedural item card requesting that the order in which agenda items have been agreed for debate is changed. However before a procedural item vote is taken, the proposer of the procedural item must specify the proposed new order of agenda items. A procedural item vote is then taken. If passed, the new order of agenda items will take effect. If the procedural item vote is lost, the order of agenda items remains unchanged.

- Amending an agenda item from the floor – amendments to an agenda item may be proposed and seconded by voting members from the floor by way of the procedural item process (see section 14 and 17 for the full process). The proposer of the procedural item must specify the amendment to the agenda item in full. A vote on the procedural item is them taken. If the procedural item vote is passed, the new wording will take effect. If the procedural item vote is lost, the original wording of the agenda item remains unchanged.

    - If the amendment results in a matter for discussion becoming a resolution, the Chair of Congress will ask for the resolution to be formally proposed and seconded before discussion continues.

- Varying the time of the debate and the time allowed for speakers - voting members may submit a procedural item card requesting that the timing of the debate is extended or reduced. The proposer of the procedural item must specify the variation. A procedural item vote is then taken. If passed, the variation will take immediate effect. If the procedural item vote is lost, the timing remains unchanged.

  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 entity. To be passed, the variation of time limits will require the agreement of a majority of voting members. NB: Members of Council, the Professional Nursing Committee, the Trade Union Committee and Country and Regional Boards are non-voting members.

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. The main hall slides set out what is a Point of Order. 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.

18.3 Any person who is registered and attending Congress who wishes to raise a point of order must in the first instance speak to a member of the Agenda Committee at their table in the main hall. The members of the Agenda Committee will ask the individual to clarify the reasons for its introduction to ensure it meets the criteria of a point of order. If it does meet the criteria, the individual will be asked to approach the stated microphone in the main hall and hold up their point of order card.

18.4 If the Chair considers that the point being made is not a point of order, they may ask the person to cease speaking with immediate effect.

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 entity they are from.

19.2 Members must declare if they are a Council, Professional Nursing Committee, Trade Union Committee or Country or Regional Board member and be aware of potential conflicts of interest.

19.3 Likewise Agenda Committee members must declare who they are should they get up to speak and be aware of potential conflicts of interest.

19.4 All speakers will address their remarks to the Chair. The Chair will ask speakers who come up to the microphone repeatedly to give priority to first time speakers.

20. Reporting from Congress

20.1 All members who register to attend Congress will receive:

- a report from Council 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 an emergency agenda item for consideration by the Agenda Committee.

20.3 Members are reminded that the AGM, as opposed to Congress, is their opportunity to ask questions about the running of the organisation.

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 by the Vice-Chair at the first session of Congress.

- Subsequent reports from Agenda Committee meetings during Congress will be presented by the Vice-Chair of Congress at appropriate times throughout the week.