

## RCGP First5 Chair 2026

### Information for applicants

We're pleased that you are interested in becoming either the RCGP's First5 Chair. This guide is designed to give those thinking of applying guidance on what the role involves, and the steps an applicant will need to complete to become First5 chair.

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## 1. What does the First5 chair do?

Every 3-years the RCGP elect a Chair of our First5 community, chosen by all First5 members, to enhance their membership experience. The role provides leadership to the RCGP's First5 agenda, providing a representative voice on behalf of all First5 members. The detailed role description can be found later in this guide.

### **Shaping the First5 experience**

Making a difference on what it means to be an First5 member at the RCGP is a key motivation for lots of people. You might be thinking in terms of equality, improving First5 opportunities, or being part of a wider First5 community with a big voice and a strong conscience. Or you might have ideas about how to enhance the College's membership offering for First5 members. Whatever your motivation, standing for office gives you a chance to shape what happens next.

### **A unique experience**

You'll have the opportunity to lead a community of over 10,000 members! You will also have the opportunity to represent the views of your peers at RCGP Council and in many meetings with senior figures of the profession. As well as fulfilling your specific role, you'll work with RCGP Officers, staff and your peers to deliver support and activity for thousands of First5s across the UK.

### **Meet many inspiring and influential individuals**

You'll get to know likeminded people with the energy and passion for enhancing the experience of First5 members. There's plenty of training, networking, and mentoring opportunities with notable leaders of general practice.

### **Leadership and personal development**

Through training and lived experience, very few members across the country will experience the kind of development opportunities that our First5 Chair will.

## 2. The role and its responsibilities

### **Term of office**

The term of First5 Chair will last for three years and individuals are limited to just one term. The role may be terminated if the post-holder wishes not to continue or fails to adhere to the duties associated with the role, as outlined in this document. If this is to occur, alternatives arrangements will be made including consideration for appointing and/or electing a replacement.

### **Time commitment**

Postholders are invited to attend numerous meetings and engagements during their tenure, these are outlined in the role description.

Besides sitting on Council (more information below), the First5 Chair will be expected to provide leadership to local faculty representatives as part of the GP registrar Community Group. GP registrar Community Group meetings take place four times a year to coincide with Council meetings - typically these meetings take place in the evening (19:00 to 21:00), with an annual opportunity to meet face-to-face.

Council typically meets four times a year (March, June, September, and November). Dates alternate between Fridays (March and September) and Saturdays (June and November). [Council dates for the coming year are available on the RCGP website.](#)

Council meetings usually run from 09:30 to 16:30. As a Council member you are expected to read and review all Council papers in preparation for Council and attend all Council meetings. Council members are encouraged to attend in person, but virtual attendance is available.

Themed workshops are usually held twice a year before Council meetings. Attendance is encouraged whenever possible as the topics are relevant and varied and joining the workshops is a chance to network with fellow Council members, share ideas, and enhance your professional development in a relaxed and informal setting. Council members are also occasionally asked to join additional workshops between Council meetings. Workshops are usually held in person.

Outside of formal meetings, evening webinars are occasionally organised ahead of Council meetings to provide further information and an opportunity to ask questions on specific Council agenda items and business. Any other Council business is carried out by email.

## Expenses

This is a voluntary position with reasonable out of pocket expenses reclaimable up to the limits outlined in the RCGP Expenses Policy. All travel and hotel accommodation (except for 30 Euston Square) must be booked via the College's travel agents, Diversity Travel. Non-financial benefits are provided to recognise the significant contribution each postholder makes during their tenure.

## Core responsibilities

The First5 Chair:

1. Represent the views and experiences of First5 and improve the RCGP's understanding of its First5 members.
2. Provide feedback on behalf of First5 members to enhance their training and membership experience.
3. Enhance communication between First5 members, RCGP Officers, and staff.
4. Uphold the aims, objectives and values of the College and act in its best interests and enhance its reputation as a respected professional and academic body for GPs.
5. Adhere to the relevant policies and procedures, including Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, Information Security and Data Protection.

Though the First5 will have additional responsibilities (see below) - these core duties, and the need to work collaboratively - will be of upmost importance.

#### **Responsibilities of the First5:**

- Proactively represent the views and experiences of First5 members relating to College priorities and engagement activity.
- Speak on policy matters pertaining to the experience of First5 members.
- Provide leadership to local faculty representatives as part of the First5Community Group, chairing quarterly meetings and fostering a sense of community amongst reps.
- Be a member of UK Council.

#### **Collective responsibility**

The First5 Chair, as a senior postholder who sits on a wide range of College boards and committees, is expected to adhere to the principles of collegiality and collective responsibility. The College is a diverse organisation that encourages debate and constructive challenge as a way to ensure a broad range of views are heard and ultimately to facilitate robust decision making.

The principle of collective responsibility requires that members of RCGP boards and committees should be able to express their views frankly in the expectation that they can argue freely in private while maintaining a united front when decisions have been reached. This in turn requires that the privacy of opinions expressed in boards and committees, including in correspondence, should be maintained. Decision reached by boards and committees are binding on all board or committee members.

The principle of collegiality is outlined in the [Members' Code of Conduct](#):

##### **Collegiality**

All Members must uphold the standing of the College and conduct themselves in a manner which does not risk bringing the College into disrepute. Legitimate disagreements with the College leadership, direction, policy, and decision-making, should not be expressed in such a manner as to bring the College into disrepute. Decisions taken by Groups of which the member is a part must be fully respected and the principle of “collective responsibility” observed.

#### **Members' Code of Conduct and Behavioural Framework**

Council members are expected to act as exemplars of good conduct to whom others can look to for guidance and advice. All College members must agree to observe and uphold the Members' Code of Conduct. The RCGP Members' Code of Conduct is available [on the College website](#).

All College members are expected to adhere to the [Behavioral Framework](#) which sets out the principles for successful working relationships. Applicants should ensure they have read and understood the expectations set out in the framework before applying.

### 3. How to become the First5 chair - introduction to the nomination and election processes

There are two stages to becoming the First5:

- i. **nominations** - where those interested in standing in the election apply to become a candidate, followed by
- ii. **elections** - where candidates are selected based on a ballot of all eligible members.

It is important that those interested in becoming the First5 Chair read the following information carefully before beginning an application.

Nominations and elections are facilitated through the RCGP election microsite which is managed by an independent election agent. No applications or CVs sent directly will be accepted. This ensures elections are carried out in a fair and independent way.

An overview of the nomination and election processes for 2026:

<b>Nomination stage:</b>  <b>June 2026</b>	<b>Tuesday 16 June</b> Nominations open all applicants must provide a proposer and a seconder.	Applicant completes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nomination form</li> <li>• Probity declaration</li> <li>• Declaration of interests.</li> </ul>	Election agent sends an email verification to the proposer and seconder to confirm support for the applicant.	<b>Thursday 30 June 2026</b> nominations close.
<b>Assessment stage:</b>  <b>July 2026</b>	The election agent and the RCGP Governance team assess the nomination forms for completeness.	RCGP Honorary Secretary reviews applications, probity and declarations of interests and any potential issues or concerns are addressed.		<b>In July</b> applicants informed if they have been accepted as a candidate canvassing may begin. Hustings to be held on either 07 <sup>th</sup> / 09 <sup>th</sup> July 2026
<b>Election stage:</b>  <b>July/August 2026</b>	<b>Tuesday 14 July</b> Voting opens candidate names are shown in alphabetical order, surname first.	Elections are conducted using the Single Transferable Vote system. An explanation is available on the		<b>Tuesday 4 August at noon</b> voting closes.

		election microsite.		
<b>Results:</b> <b>August</b> <b>September</b> <b>2026</b>	Election agent provides RCGP with a report on voting	Returning Officer aims to contact candidates as soon as possible after the voting report has been received.	Results formally announced at September Council meeting.	Newly elected First5 Chair officially takes up their new role at November Council.

#### 4. Nominations - completing the nomination form

The first step is to complete the nominations form on the election microsite in full. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all sections of the nomination form and any supporting documents are completed by the deadline. Incomplete applications will not be taken forward. Nomination forms cannot be submitted or amended after the deadline has passed.

##### Eligibility to stand

Any RCGP First5 member may stand for election if they have 18 or more months left of their First5 years, whilst also being an active member of an RCGP Faculty Board or Devolved Nation Council or Committee. Your nomination will require the support of two RCGP members in good standing.

##### Proposers and seconders

In order to apply to become First5 chair applicants must have a "proposer" and a "seconders". The purpose of the proposer and seconders is to indicate endorsement and support for the applicant's nomination. The name of proposers and seconders appear on the ballot paper.

Applicants must obtain consent from their proposers and seconders before submitting their application. The nomination form will ask applicants to provide the following information regarding their proposer and seconders:

- Full Name
- Membership Number (RCGP ID)
- Email Address
- Relationship - how the applicant knows their proposer and seconders.

There must be no conflicts of interest when proposing and seconding an applicant. For example, the proposer or seconders must not be related to or a business partner of an applicant.

Proposers and seconders must meet the following requirements:

- They must be a member of the RCGP in good standing, meaning fully paid up in fees and subscriptions due to the College

- A proposer or a seconder can nominate **only one applicant in any election** Your proposer and seconder must not be proposing or seconding anyone else in the same election.
- An applicant cannot be a proposer or a seconder for another applicant standing in the same election
- Serving UK College Officers, which means the Provost, the President of UK Council and the Vice presidents cannot act as a proposer or seconder for any applicant.
- Devolved Council Chairs and Vice Chairs cannot act as a proposer or seconder for any applicant
- Faculty Board Chairs cannot act as a proposer or seconder for any applicant
- Serving Trustee Board members cannot act as a proposer or seconder for any applicant
- GP Registrars cannot act as proposers or seconders.

A verification email from the election agent will be sent to the proposer and seconder to confirm their support for the applicant. The College will carry out checks to ensure listed individuals meet the requirements to act as proposers and seconders and that there are no conflicts of interest between the applicant and their proposer and seconder.

If there is any doubt if an individual can act as a proposer or seconder applicants are urged to contact the [Governance team](#) well in advance of the deadline to discuss the matter as it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure their proposer and seconder meet the requirements.

The postholder's educational supervisor may also be asked to provide a reference to testify to their training attainment and status at the point of nomination.

## Election statement and video

Applicants are required to provide an election statement of no more than 500 words as part of their nomination form. This is an opportunity to explain to the electorate how your ideas and experience can make a positive contribution to both the direction of the RCGP and to the day-to-day work of College members.

The election statement:

- must make reference to the Council's new [Priorities](#) and how you will support the College to achieve its strategic objectives. The College's previous strategy 2023-2026 is in the process of being updated but can be found here for reference: <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/about#strategy>
- should recognise that the College's purpose is to promote general practice and not just one specific priority or clinical area
- cannot advocate for other applicants
- may include social media links (LinkedIn, Facebook) but these will count towards the word limit.

Election statements are addressed to the electorate and are published on the elections microsite but should not be publicly shared by other candidates or College members unless they have the explicit permission of the statement's author.

Applicants may also wish to produce and submit an optional short video to accompany their written statement. The content of the video statement should meet the same requirements as the written statement. Submission of a video is not mandatory. Your video must:

- be no longer than two minutes
- be in MP4 format
- be clear and in focus
- be clearly audible
- be in colour
- contain no other people, words, or special effects
- be taken against a plain light-coloured background
- show your head, shoulders, and upper body.

Submitted videos meeting these criteria will be posted to the election microsite alongside the written statement. Video statements that do not meet these standards may be rejected.

## Photograph

Applicants must provide a photograph with their nomination. Please ensure the photograph:

- is portrait orientated
- is in JPEG format
- is a minimum of 100 x 150 pixels
- is clear and in focus
- is in colour
- contains no other objects, words, or people
- is taken against a plain light-coloured background
- shows your head, shoulders, and upper body.

If you experience any difficulties when uploading videos, photographs, or other materials please contact the election agent directly via the [Help](#) section of the election microsite.

## Probity declaration

When you fill out the nomination form you must to complete and sign a probity declaration. This is to demonstrate to wider members that you're fit to hold office and represent them on the College Council. This is an essential part of the form. Not disclosing relevant information when requested is likely to be deemed a breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

## Declaration of Interests

As part of the nomination process you must complete a Declaration of Interests. This part of the nomination form asks a series of questions relating to any interests you may have, whether financial or if you have any loyalties to other organisations. Your declaration is an essential part of the application and failure to complete the form in full will mean an application cannot be taken forward.

All interests must be declared and if you are in any doubt over the relevance of an interest the advice is to err on the side of caution and declare. The Declarations of Interest Policy is available [on the College website](#) and is essential reading to ensure all interests and conflicts are included in the declaration. Once submitted, declaration forms are reviewed by the Honorary Secretary and any potential issues that are identified will be discussed with applicants before the elections are held.

**The form will be part of the candidate's information that is made available to the electorate. It is important to note that Declarations of Interests of Council members may be subject to publication to other Council members and to members.**

## 5. The Assessment stage

Once a nomination form has been submitted the election agent and the College will review the nomination to ensure:

- the applicant meets the eligibility criteria to stand
- the proposer and seconder support the applicant, meet the requirements for acting as proposers and seconders, and have no conflicts of interest with the applicant
- the applicant has completed all probity declarations
- the applicant has completed the Declaration of Interests form in full, and there are no potential or actual conflicts
- the applicant's photograph and video (if submitted) meet the necessary standards.

Once assessment has been completed applicants will be informed whether their candidature has been accepted.

It should be noted that any formal withdrawal by an applicant invalidates their application and cannot be reversed.

## 6. Canvassing

The College recognises the importance of promoting and discussing ideas with College members. In order to ensure canvassing is conducted in a fair and consistent way, all those applying for elected RCGP roles must follow the [Canvassing Code of Practice](#).

The Code of Practice states that individuals may not begin canvassing until they have been formally accepted as a candidate. Candidates standing for Council Officer roles will be provided with a current Council mailing list of those Council members who have consented for their data to be used in this way. Particular attention should be paid to the Codes around contacting individual members and the use of RCGP emails, branding, social media, and other resources.

Candidates may be liable to disqualification from the election if found to be in breach of the terms of this Canvassing Code of Practice. The full Code of Practice is included in this information pack as [Appendix 2](#). Candidates should ensure they have fully read the document before beginning any canvassing activity.

## 7. Elections and results

The ballot will open on Tuesday 14 July 2026 and will close on Tuesday 4 August 2026 at noon. Voting will be online only through the election microsite.

- The ballot is organised and overseen by the College's external election agent, Civica, who act on our behalf but remains independent
- The election is conducted using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. Candidates are encouraged to read and understand the guidance on how STV voting works which is available on the election microsite
- To avoid bias, candidates' names are printed in random order (not in alphabetical order) surname first (e.g. SMITH, John).

The Returning Officer will aim to contact candidates as soon as is practicable after the results have been officially confirmed to share the outcome of the ballot.

Candidates will also receive the results of the ballot in writing along with a copy of the full report of voting. **Candidates should note that this year, to improve transparency, the full report of voting will be published on the RCGP website.**

Once the Returning Officer has advised all the candidates of the results, the results will be shared with the College's Press team. Results will be announced at September Council.

## 8. Queries and the role of the Returning Officer

If you have any further questions the Governance team are happy to advise and help. Please email us at [advocates@rcgp.org](mailto:advocates@rcgp.org).

For technical advice relating to using the election microsite please refer to the [Help](#) section on the site [www.cesvotes.com/rcgp2026](http://www.cesvotes.com/rcgp2026).

During the election stage all answers provided in response to questions from individual candidates will be shared with all candidates to ensure everyone is given the same information.

Candidates should note that in the case of any queries, disputes or challenges which might occur throughout the elections process the decision of the Returning Officer is final, as laid out in the [RCGP Byelaws](#).

## 9. Checklist for applicants

To complete an application to become First5 Chair you will need to ensure you have done the following:

- Check you are happy to take on this voluntary role and are able to meet the time commitment required
- Check you are eligible to apply
- Read the [RCGP Members' Code of Conduct](#)
- Identify a proposer and seconder who are happy to support your application and who have no conflicts of interest with you
- Following the guidance in this document, complete all sections of the nomination form on the election microsite
- If you are submitting a video statement, check the video meets the requirements specified in this document and upload to the election microsite
- Upload your photograph, ensuring it meets the requirements specified in this document
- Complete the Probity declaration
- Read the [RCGP Declarations of Interest Policy. and complete the Declaration of Interests section in full on the nomination form. This will be included in the candidate's information that is made available to the electorate.](#)
- Read the guidance on the Single Transferable Vote system. Note that full election results will be published following the elections.
- Submit your application before the deadline and await confirmation of a response from the team, noting that confirmation of candidature may take several weeks.

# First5 Chair

## Role Description

Updated April 2026

### Overview

RCGP would not exist without its members, each of which has their own needs, interests, and aspirations. It supports and encourages its members to shape their membership experience. To enable this to happen, RCGP appoint an elected representative from its community of First5 members to carry out the role of First5 Chair. The role is designed to ensure that the voice of First5 members is heard in relation to matters that affect their experience as a member of the RCGP.

### Purpose

The role of the First5 Chair exists to:

- Represent the views and experiences of First5 members
- Improve the RCGP's understanding of First5 members
- Enhance the membership experience of First5 members
- Provide direct feedback on behalf of First5 members
- Enhance communication between First5 members, RCGP Officers, and staff.

### Duties and responsibilities

The First5 Chair will be expected to:

- Proactively represent the views and experiences of their peers
- Make known the needs, interests, and challenges of First5 members
- Be known and accessible to all First5 members
- Provide leadership to local faculty representatives as part of their Career Stage Group
- Attend RCGP UK Council and other key meetings to provide a First5 perspective
- Champion the RCGP and its charitable objectives
- Adhere to the relevant policies and procedures, including Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, Information Security and Data Protection.

### Skills and attributes required

RCGP is committed to equal opportunities and welcomes nominations from all members eligible to stand for election. The following skills and attributes are required at the time of election:

- Be a current 'First5' member of the RCGP with >18 months left of their first five years post-CCT
- Be an active representative on an RCGP Faculty Board or Devolved Nation Council/Committee
- Reliable and willing to commit to requirements of the role, as outlined above
- To represent the views of their peers in a cooperative and respectful manner
- Enthusiastic to enhance the First5 membership experience
- Confident in speaking to people from a diverse range of backgrounds and expertise
- Motivated to make positive change on behalf of the members they represent
- Willingness to uphold the values of the RCGP.

## **Support and benefits available**

In recognition of time postholders will receive:

- A full induction and appropriate training for the role
- Ongoing support and guidance from peers and RCGP staff
- Mentorship from senior colleagues including RCGP Officers
- The opportunity to work and network with senior members of the profession
- The opportunity to develop knowledge and skills with a key focus on leadership
- The opportunity to contribute to the work and the future direction of the RCGP
- Reimbursement of pre-approved and reasonable expenses

## **Remuneration**

This role is done on a voluntary basis

## **Term of office**

The postholder will carry out the role of First5 Chair for 3 years.

## **Nomination and election**

The following stipulations apply:

- The role will be elected by all First5 members, with all eligible to vote.
- In order to stand for election, candidates must be a:
  - Current 'First5' member of the RCGP with >18 months left of their first five years post-CCT
  - Representative on an RCGP Faculty Board or Devolved Nation Council/Committee.
- During the year the election takes place, the postholder will take office in November.
- Having been elected, the successful candidate will be eligible to appoint their own deputy with the support of the First5 community group.
- In the event the postholder is not fulfilling the required duties of the role or is seen to bring the RCGP into disrepute, appropriate action will be taken in accordance with RCGP policy and the guidance of the Governance team.

# Canvassing Code of Practice

This Code of Practice sets out the high standards of conduct expected from all candidates for elected Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) roles. It complements the RCGP Code of Conduct and Behavioural Framework, which support every member in contributing positively to the College community. Candidates are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the RCGP values and the [Social Media Policy for Office Holders and Volunteers](#).

To support a fair and transparent election process, all candidates are required to follow this Code in full.

Individuals may begin canvassing once they have been formally notified that they meet the requirements to stand as a candidate.

From that point, candidates are welcome to engage in campaigning that highlights their qualifications, competencies and vision for the role, provided they do so in line with this Code of Practice and the spirit of the RCGP's Behavioural Framework, Members' Code of Conduct and [Social Media Policy](#).

The RCGP reserves the right to amend its terms and conditions as it sees fit.

## Use of social media

Canvassing using personal, non-RCGP affiliated or branded social media channels is allowed, subject to adherence to the [RCGP's Behavioural Framework](#), Members' Code of Conduct and [Social Media Policy](#).

Candidates are welcome to share their views and personal profiles and are encouraged to do so in a constructive and positive way. They should avoid making negative remarks about any other candidate or member of College staff. When using social media to share information about the election, candidates are encouraged to use the College's official election weblinks. Candidates must not refer to other candidates or their campaigns in any way.

## Use of Email

Canvassing by email is welcomed, provided it follows General Data Protection Regulations. Candidates are encouraged to use personal data responsibly by keeping information secure and ensuring it is only shared with recorded consent. While email canvassing is permitted, candidates should avoid sending unsolicited messages to large groups or contacting individuals excessively; in most cases, two emails will be sufficient, unless responding to specific questions.

Candidates standing for Nationally elected roles (President and Nationally Elected Council Member) will not access or use any Collegeheld member databases for

canvassing. They may, however, use their own personal databases or those of another organisation to which they have access, provided they follow standard data- protection- requirements.

Candidates for Council Officer roles will receive a current Council mailing list. All serving Council members' names and email addresses will be shared with candidates under GDPR Legitimate Interests (Article 6(1)(f)) and/or Contractual/role necessity (Article 6(1)(b)).

## Funding

The RCGP does not provide funding or expenses for candidates' campaigns.

## Role of College and Council Officers

The President and the Council Officers (Chair of Council and the Vice Chairs, should remain impartial during the nomination and election period for all College elections. They are not permitted to act as proposers or seconders for candidates or participate in canvassing, directly or indirectly, by expressing support or disapproval of a particular candidate.

## Role of Devolved Council Officers

Devolved Nation Council Officers should, in the same way as College and Council Officers, remain impartial during the nomination and election period for all College elections. The Devolved Nation Chairs are not permitted to act as proposers or seconders for candidates or participate in canvassing, directly or indirectly, by expressing support or disapproval of a particular candidate.

## Role of Faculty Board Chairs

Faculty Board Chairs, like College and Council Officers, are expected to remain impartial throughout the nomination and election period for all College elections. To support a fair and balanced process, Faculty Board Chairs may not act as proposers or seconders for candidates, nor take part in canvassing—directly or indirectly—by expressing support for, or disapproval of, any candidate.

## Candidates currently holding Officer or other RCGP roles

Candidates who already hold officer or other RCGP roles are encouraged to continue fulfilling their responsibilities, while taking care not to use their position to advance their campaign. In practice, this means avoiding any mention of their candidacy at events where they are representing the RCGP, not canvassing during time allocated to their RCGP duties, and not using RCGP resources, support or information for campaign purposes.

## Restrictions

Candidates must not:

- a. Use any RCGP email address, social media account, branding, stationery or other RCGP resources, including faculty and Devolved Council accounts or publications, for canvassing.
- b. Use any RCGP databases or mailing lists gained through their work or involvement with the College for any election related purpose. This includes historic groups or databases from previous roles. Candidates for Council Officer roles will receive the current Council mailing list of members who have consented to its use; this is the only permitted- database.
- c. Canvass through national media or press. Candidates should not make comments to journalists or respond publicly, including via social media. Any media enquiries about their candidacy or the elections must be referred immediately to the media team.
- d. Employ agents or private third parties to canvass on their behalf.
- e. Make adverse comments about another candidate's statement, video, social media activity or any other aspect of their campaign.
- f. Approach the President, Chair, Vice Chairs of Council, Devolved Nation Council Officers of Faculty Board Chairs for endorsement.
- g. Approach any RCGP Trustee Board member for endorsement.
- h. Ask any RCGP Member or Fellow to undertake activity on their behalf that would breach this Code. Any Member or Fellow who does so will be subject to investigation by the Returning Officer.
- i. i. Ask any member of staff for access to RCGP media channels, information or support for canvassing. Candidates seeking information should contact [council@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:council@rcgp.org.uk).

Candidates must:

- a. Ensure that any statements or claims they make or endorse are accurate, fair, reasonable and not misleading.

- b. Maintain the confidentiality, integrity and good standing of the RCGP and its elections at all times, and avoid any action that could bring them into disrepute.

## Breaches of the Code

The RCGP Returning Officer has the responsibility for ensuring that all candidates follow this Code and may take any steps necessary to support that aim.

The Returning Officer will look into all reported concerns and, where appropriate, issue informal warnings, formal written warnings or cease-and-desist requests.

If a candidate is found to have breached the Code, the Returning Officer may disqualify them from the election. The Returning Officer's decisions on all matters relating to the Code are final and binding for all candidates.

# Social Media Policy for Office Holders and Volunteers

## Introduction

### What is social media?

Social media is the term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create and share content (words, images and video), and network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media used by the RCGP include Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads, Bluesky and YouTube. We also run a Forum for members, hosted on the platform Discourse.

### Why do we use social media?

Social media is essential to the success of communicating RCGP's work. Office holders and volunteers can play an important role by participating in social media to engage with our audiences, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of our work.

### Why do we need a social media policy?

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to RCGP's work. While we encourage the use of social media, we have certain standards, outlined in this policy, which we require all office holders and volunteers to observe. Publication and commentary on social media carry similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain and expectations are set out in the [RCGP Behavioural Framework](#).

Before engaging in work-related social media activity, all office holders and volunteers must read this policy. All staff must read the staff social media policy.

# 1. Policy statement

1.1 RCGP is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation, including social media to improve the way it communicates, reaches out and interacts with the wider community.

1.2. This policy sets out guidelines on the use of social media by office holders and volunteers in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is intended to help protect the reputation of the RCGP, minimise the occurrence and severity of information security incidents and to help individuals avoid potentially serious consequences which may arise from using social media inappropriately. The expectations set out in the [RCGP Behavioural Framework](#) must be observed at all times.

1.3 Volunteers include individuals who hold a paid or unpaid college post and includes roles such as trustees and committee members, Council members, members of Faculty Boards, College representatives, advisers and other roles making a contribution to RCGP. All volunteers have a staff point of contact who can advise on the application of this policy to volunteer roles.

1.4 There is a separate policy for staff.

1.5 Our Social Media Team is responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of RCGP's official, national social media channels. Currently the RCGP uses Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads, Bluesky and YouTube at a national level and all are clearly identifiable as official College channels. We also run a Forum for members, hosted on the platform Discourse. No other staff member can post content on these channels without the permission of the Social Media Manager.

1.6 Devolved Nation and Faculties also use Facebook and LinkedIn, and some but not all use YouTube and Instagram. These are the responsibility of the Heads of Devolved Nation offices and the Head of English Faculties and from the date of this policy, only staff members should post on these channel - not office holders or volunteers. New log-in and administrator responsibilities will be put in place where required.

1.7 The responsibilities of staff with oversight of RCGP social media channels include moderating third-party content and deciding what comments to engage with. If you have specific questions, please speak to the Social Media Manager about the channels used at national level and the Head of Devolved Nation or English Faculties if this relates to their areas.

## 2. Basic principles

2.1 These principles apply to professional use of social media on behalf of RCGP as well as personal use.

2.2 Office holders and volunteers who are practising doctors should familiarise themselves, and comply at all times, with the General Medical Council's guidance on Good medical practice and its specific guidance GMC's Doctors' use of social media.

2.3 This policy is intended to be supplementary to the GMC guidance outlined above.

2.4 All office holders and volunteers must:

- **use common sense and good judgement.** Office holders and volunteers are accountable for their actions and their statements could have an impact on the reputation of RCGP. Office holders and volunteers should also remember that what is posted or published may be in the public domain for a long time.
- **not post information that is false or taken out of context.** You must be confident about the veracity of information posted and not cut and paste selected facts that could change the context. Where a mistake is made, it should be corrected or clarified immediately.
- **always check facts.** Do not automatically assume that material is accurate and take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification, for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation.
- **be respectful.** Office holders and volunteers must always be fair and courteous to fellow colleagues, members, or people who work on behalf of the College even if they disagree with their opinion. Criticising staff on social media is not acceptable conduct.
- **be sensible.** When posting, avoid using statements, photos, video or audio that someone else would think is private or which reasonably could be viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening or intimidating, or that might constitute harassment or bullying. Examples of this type of conduct might include offensive posts meant to intentionally harm someone's reputation, are in breach of the Equality Act 2010 or creates disharmony in the workplace.
- **be transparent and disclose their relationship with RCGP.** Office holders and volunteers writing about RCGP should use their real name (not a pseudonym), identify that they volunteer for/work with the RCGP and be clear about their role.
- **not disclose, post or share confidential information or communications.** This may include financial data, systems and technology information, intellectual property and operating plans. If an office holder or volunteer is uncertain as to whether information is meant to be private or internal to the College, they should avoid commenting or posting on the matter.

- **be extra careful around politically sensitive issues.** This is especially true if your role with the College may have contact with the media or politicians. It is generally better to criticise policies rather than the politician themselves. RCGP is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We have every right to express views on policy relating to our charitable purpose, including the policies of parties, but we can't tell people how to vote. When representing RCGP, volunteers are expected to hold RCGP's position of neutrality.
- **do not use RCGP logo or branding.** The RCGP logo is not appropriate for individuals to use in social media posts. Any use of the RCGP logo requires approval through a formal endorsement request made to the Honorary Secretary.
- refer all media and press enquiries to the Press Team if an official response is needed and copy in the Social Media Team. Office holders or volunteers should not speak about or on behalf of RCGP with the media or press without contacting an authorised official.

2.5 If office holders or volunteers post inappropriate content on social media, RCGP will act swiftly to minimise the impact on those affected and protect the reputation of the RCGP. This includes action to disown or condemn the post.

2.6 If you know that a topic is controversial then please ask for advice before posting. There's little room for nuance on social media and it's very easy to start a debate or argument when posting about certain topics.

### 3. Personal responsibility

3.1 Office holders and volunteers are personally responsible for their posts and comments, which will be published on the internet and may be viewed publicly. They can be hard to delete once published and may remain online for a long time. There are many high-profile examples of how an individual has used social media to say something in the heat of the moment that they have later had cause to regret, or to behave in a way at odds with their usual personal or professional standards. Office holders and volunteers are advised to reflect carefully on these guidelines before publishing content or commenting.

3.2 This policy also applies to posts made by office holders or volunteers on private groups, chats and forums (for example WhatsApp, closed Facebook groups and Reddit.) RCGP does not monitor these channels but if any posts made breach the policy, then the same principles apply.

3.3 If an office holder or volunteer has set up a social media account on which they post content which is partially or entirely related to the work of the College, they must make clear the nature of their affiliation with RCGP in their bio, and keep it up to date. Their profile and any content posted should be consistent with the professional image RCGP wishes them to present to members, external stakeholders and colleagues.

3.4 If an office holder or volunteer chooses to disclose an affiliation with RCGP on a personal profile or any social media postings, they must include the disclaimer “all views are my own” (or otherwise make clear that their views do not represent those of RCGP) in their bio or post.

3.5 Care must be taken to avoid threatening or damaging the reputation of RCGP. This can happen where RCGP is tagged or cited directly in a social media post, or the person posting is associated with the RCGP - perhaps because they hold or have previously held a paid or unpaid role with the organisation. Even with a disclaimer saying it represents a personal view, a social media post may be seen as being endorsed by the RCGP or as evidence of a disagreement within the organisation.

3.6 RCGP encourages office holders and volunteers to block, and if appropriate report, any users they feel are bullying, harassing or insulting them on their personal social media accounts. Anyone feeling bullied or harassed on an RCGP social media account, or by an RCGP member or employee should refer to the [RCGP Behavioural Framework](#) for further information on how to escalate concerns.

3.7 Those in senior management, and specialist roles where they are well known in their field of expertise, must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing RCGP's view.

3.8 When leaving Officer or volunteer roles, individuals may need to reference their former roles, e.g. when declaring an important declaration of interest or providing a biography as part of an interview or event published on social media. General use of a title, preceded by the word ‘former’, is discouraged.

3.9 In any circumstances where reference is made to former roles, individuals must take care not to give the impression they continue to speak for RCGP.

## 4. Oversight and controls

### RCGP national social media channels

4.1 Our Social Media Team is responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of RCGP national social media channels. The Social Media Manager is responsible for reviewing content posted to these accounts and will decide if we need to delete content. Other teams who have access to the accounts include the Press team, Public Affairs and Marketing.

4.2 When the Social Media Team needs to ensure accuracy of information, they will share content with relevant teams before posting. Additional approval will be required from the Assistant Director of PR and Corporate Comms when there is the risk of reputational damage.

4.3 If there is a social media crisis or an external event which means it could be deemed insensitive to post (for example a significant global event) the Social Media Manager will suspend posting on social media, postpone scheduled posts and liaise with relevant teams and the Assistant Director of PR and Corporate Comms to agree any further action.

## Other RCGP social media channels

4.4 Faculties and Devolved Nations also have social media accounts which they are responsible for. The accounts are run centrally by these teams and only RCGP staff are permitted access to post on these accounts.

4.5 Accounts which support core RCGP products and publications (such as BJGP Online, InnovAit, and RCGP Annual Conference) are approved by the Assistant Director of PR and Corporate Comms and are managed by staff.

4.6 Accounts relating to other RCGP specialised activities are established where there is a clear need. Requests are discussed with the Social Media Team to agree the purpose of the account and how the impact will be assessed. A staff member will be the account administrator responsible for posts. There is a reputational risk of not maintaining accounts and these should be closed when no longer required.

## 5. Breaches of this policy

5.1 All office holders and volunteers are required to adhere to this policy. If they violate this policy, RCGP may require them to correct, edit or remove a post or statement. Office holders and volunteers should be aware that use of social media in a way that may be deemed as deliberate or inadvertent misuse could be a breach and may lead to action being taken by RCGP.

5.2 Breaches will usually be picked up through the Social Media Team's monitoring of channels, or by Devolved Nation and Faculty managers. Anyone can email the relevant team to let them know if they think a breach has occurred.

5.3 The office holder or volunteer point of contact should consult the [Social Media Team](#) to help advise them as to how to respond to content which is problematic, and action required to avoid any reputational damage. They may ask an officer holder or volunteer to delete their post or issue an apology/updated post.

5.4 If the Office holder or volunteer fails to respond to any requests to take remedial action, the relevant manager will escalate the issue as a complaint to their Assistant Director to advise on appropriate action to protect RCGP's reputation. This may include RCGP action to disown the comments.

5.5 Serious breaches, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to RCGP, may result in a [Code of Conduct](#) investigation and appropriate sanction under the Code. All such cases will initially be sent to the Chief Executive Officer to initiate a response by the Honorary Secretary.

5.6 If the breach of policy is a post or comment made by an Officer, Trustee (and Trustee Committee members) or Council member, it will be referred to the Assistant Director of Governance who will consult with the Chief Executive Officer to decide if it needs to be escalated to the Trustee Board.

## 6. Public Interest Disclosure ('whistleblowing')

6.1 Legal protection for whistleblowers (under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013) is qualified. Where an office holder or volunteer releases information through social media that may be considered as whistle blowing, the RCGP Whistleblowing Policy must be initiated in the first instance before any further action is taken.