



Royal College
of Physicians

A year of transformation

How we responded to
The King's Fund independent
learning review

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Foreword



This short report captures a year of real change and progress at the Royal College of Physicians (RCP). The independent learning review carried out by The King's Fund gave us an important opportunity to reflect on how we work and how we can better serve our members and fellows, as well as the wider healthcare community.

What has impressed me most is the way everyone across the college – our staff, volunteers and members – has been galvanised to come together to drive these improvements. We've made significant steps forward, but we know there is more to do. This report highlights both our achievements and the areas where we will continue working to improve.

It was an honour to be elected as RCP president earlier this year. I promised to modernise the college and re-establish the RCP as the voice of physicians, and I am genuinely committed to ensuring that we reflect what matters most to our members and fellows.

It is a privilege to be given the opportunity to lead the RCP through this period of transformation, building a more open and supportive organisation that champions physicians at every stage of their career.

One transformation highlight I am particularly proud of is that our collegiate members now have a voice in determining the leadership of the college. This historic change, which was approved by our fellowship, will allow them to vote for the first time in elections for vice presidents and councillors. We are now exploring the legislative changes required to allow this right to include voting in presidential elections.

Looking ahead, the lessons we've learned and the progress we've made will be central to shaping our new RCP strategy for 2026–29. I am confident that, by continuing to work together, we will create a stronger, more inclusive and responsive college for the future.

Professor Mumtaz Patel
President, Royal College of Physicians

Introduction

Following the RCP extraordinary general meeting (EGM) on the role of physician associates in March 2024, we commissioned The King's Fund to carry out an independent learning review.

The review identified four key areas for improvement, relating to our leadership and culture; governance; structure and processes; and capacity and wellbeing. The resulting report provided a roadmap of recommendations for improvement.

We accepted the recommendations in full and developed an action plan, which mapped 14 actions to the four main themes. The 'Background to our action plan' section on page 15 gives an overview of the plan's framework and objectives. The plan was led by our senior officers and executive directors and reported to the Board of Trustees and RCP Council. We set ourselves the goal of completing the majority of the work by the end of 2025.

One year on, this report summarises our progress against the action plan, demonstrating how we've responded to The King's Fund learning review. It highlights the milestones we've achieved and the work that still lies ahead to drive positive change at the RCP.

Our journey has been one of reflection, collaboration and action. We've taken steps to build a stronger, more responsive RCP by strengthening our structures, engaging our members, and fostering a more inclusive and transparent environment.

Although we've made significant progress towards achieving the goals in our action plan, some work is ongoing and some will be absorbed into business-as-usual activities. These transformations in our working practices will play a vital role in shaping the development of our new strategy for 2026–29.

We've learned valuable insights and will continue to prioritise an inclusive, collaborative culture to ensure that the review delivers continuous improvement and lasting benefits for our membership, stakeholders and staff.



What's next?

The Board of Trustees commissioned the Good Governance Institute (GGi) to carry out a governance review of the RCP. The review focused on the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees and its relationship with RCP Council, governance structures, and strategic alignment of the Board of Trustees and Council.

A small working group of independent trustees, senior officers and staff worked closely with GGi to coordinate engagement with members and fellows through a series of individual meetings, focus groups and direct feedback during the review process. In recent weeks GGi has presented interim findings to both the Board of Trustees and Council, confirming that the governance structures and processes that are currently in place are compliant with Charity Commission guidance for large charities. It has also provided a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening the college and achieving governance excellence. The Board of Trustees and Council will review GGi's final report, and a formal response and action plan will be issued in the new year.

This marks the start of a modernising new chapter for the RCP and will guide continuing work to improve governance in the coming months and years.



What we've achieved

The King's Fund review represented a significant turning point for the RCP. We fully committed to implementing the recommendations, approaching the process with commitment and determination.

Delivering on the recommendations has involved coordinated cross-working and collaboration across the RCP. Our Strategy Executive Group, comprising senior officers and executive directors, was accountable for delivery. Each theme was led by an executive director and senior officer, and supported by dedicated teams. We established reporting cycles through the Project Management Office and published monthly updates on our progress for the Board of Trustees, RCP Council, our members and staff.

Key milestones included the launch of our action plan, work on our constitutional review and member engagement, the ongoing development of a new volunteer policy and processes, and an external review of governance.

Most actions are on track for completion by the end of 2025, with some governance and constitutional changes requiring ongoing engagement into 2026.

The following sections outline our progress and achievements under each of the four themes. We've used The King's Fund review as a foundation for a programme of improvement work rather than a prescriptive directive, recognising that approaches evolve over time. Its recommendations are a bedrock for continuing progress and will inform the development of our new strategy for 2026–29.



Leadership, management and culture

Our action plan

1. Create consistency across staff and volunteer people policies
2. Review appraisal structures
3. Improve induction processes for volunteers
4. Create cultural alignment across volunteer and staff workforce
5. Develop president and chair of Board of Trustees' relationship

Our achievements

The first theme of The King's Fund review focused on enhancing leadership accountability and fostering a more inclusive and transparent organisational culture across the RCP.

We established an action group involving staff, volunteers and patient representatives to look at consistency across staff and volunteer policies. In focus are our Code of Conduct, Living our values framework, People strategy and disciplinary

procedures, with the aim of helping to pinpoint gaps and areas for alignment, particularly around clinical volunteers and governance body members.

A cornerstone of this transformation is the ongoing development of a new RCP volunteer policy, which will consolidate induction, appraisal and cultural expectations into a single, coherent framework. This policy will ensure that all individuals engaged with the college – regardless of their role – are introduced to the same organisational values and behavioural standards, creating cultural alignment among staff and volunteers.

The policy also focuses on our appraisal structures and processes, drawing on best practice identified within the RCP and across peer organisations. This will help to develop a formal standardised process for senior officer appraisal, 360° feedback and accountability framework, along with self-assessment criteria aligned with RCP values. These measures will ensure that everyone in a leadership role receives regular and constructive feedback, that expectations are clear and performance is consistently monitored and supported.

We've taken significant steps to improve joint accountability at the highest levels. We established regular meetings between the president, Board of Trustees chair and chief executive, providing a platform for strategic dialogue, critical feedback and relationship building. This triumvirate approach has improved decision-making processes and alignment on key priorities and operational matters.



Change at the top

Since the release of The King's Fund review report in September 2024, new appointments have been made to the three most senior leadership positions in the RCP.

Professor Mumtaz Patel was elected as our new president in April 2025, in an election with the highest turnout since 2002. A consultant nephrologist, Mumtaz was elected on the basis of her modernising and inclusive election campaign. She is the first person of South Asian heritage to be elected as president.

We appointed Dr Diana Walford as the new chair of our Board of Trustees. Diana brings a wealth of experience in leadership roles across healthcare, public health and higher education.

And we look forward to our new chief executive Jonathan Brüün joining us in January 2026. Jono has experience of creating an inclusive and conscientious culture, and will bring a fresh perspective when he takes up post in January 2026.

Our new leadership team will play a pivotal role in continuing to steer the college through renewal and transformation, where we ensure that listening to our members and responding to their needs and concerns remain a top priority.



Governance review

Our action plan

6. Commission an external review of the governance structure, including Council operations, Board of Trustees' effectiveness, standing orders and the bye-laws
7. Develop standard operating procedures for extraordinary general meetings (EGMs) and any large meetings involving fellows or members
8. Review the constitution with a focus on voting rights
9. Review the criteria for calling an EGM

Our achievements

Governance was identified by The King's Fund as a key area for review and improvement. It formed a central pillar of our action plan, with the aim of ensuring that the RCP's governance structures and processes are robust, transparent and align with best practice. Our focus encompassed the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees, RCP Council operations, standing orders and bye-laws, and we used a highly consultative approach.

A key milestone was the commissioning of an external governance review by the Board of Trustees, overseen by a dedicated External Governance Review Group (EGRG), which included trustees, senior officers and staff. The EGRG developed a clear scope of work for the governance review, drawing on insights from other royal colleges and engaging potential external partners through a competitive process. The Good Governance Institute (GGi) was ultimately appointed following a structured series of interviews and focus groups involving Council members, trustees and executive directors.



Its review process included direct observation of Board, Council and committee meetings, stakeholder interviews and surveys, to enable a comprehensive assessment of current governance arrangements. The GGi is sharing its report and recommendations with the Board of Trustees and RCP Council. This will form the basis of ongoing work in this area.

The constitutional review, another major component of our governance workstream, focused on the college's bye-laws and the Medical Act 1860. We carried out a series of member engagement activities – surveys, Q&A sessions and committee consultations – to gather input on proposed reforms, particularly the extension of voting rights and the criteria for triggering extraordinary general meetings (EGMs). The review recommended retaining the existing threshold for EGMs (a requisition by 20 or more fellows) and identified areas for improving the clarity and accessibility of governance processes. And in a historic ballot, fellows voted to extend voting rights to collegiate members in elections for councillors and vice presidents, and to explore amending the Medical Act to extend voting rights for the election of the president. This represents a key step towards making the RCP more inclusive and responsive.

We developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) for EGMs and other large meetings as part of the constitutional review, with feedback from a Constitutional Governance Review Group (CGRG) and Council shaping their final form. These SOPs provide clear guidance on the initiation and conduct of EGMs, ensuring transparency and consistency, and are available to members on our website.





Extending voting rights

As part of our constitutional review, we asked RCP fellows to vote on a set of proposals to modernise the college's election processes. With a turnout of nearly 30 %, they voted to broaden voting rights, providing a clear mandate for change.

In total, 67 % of fellows supported extending voting rights for councillor elections and 62 % for vice president elections, giving collegiate members a democratic voice in the leadership of their college for the first time in over 500 years.

An even higher percentage (more than 75 %) said that the RCP should explore amending the Medical Act 1860 to remove restrictions and extend voting rights for the election of the president.

These results allowed us to update our bye-laws immediately and enable collegiate members – many of them resident doctors – to vote in elections for vice presidents and councillors. We will now explore next steps to widen the vote in presidential elections, which will require legislative change.

Structure and processes

Our action plan

10. Review and improve membership engagement and communications processes
11. Review management of member and other surveys to improve quality, consistency and design

Our achievements

We've made substantial progress in modernising our organisational structures and operational processes, with a particular emphasis on improving communications, member engagement and transparency. Our approach has been both strategic and pragmatic, leveraging technology and best practice to enhance the RCP's reach and impact.

We launched a new social media strategy, including the introduction of additional platforms (Bluesky and WhatsApp) and a more tailored approach to content delivery.

This has resulted in increased engagement, with initiatives like our monthly LinkedIn Digest now attracting over 20,000 subscribers and new campaigns such as 'Did you know?' and the 'Voice of medicine' monthly bulletin raising the profile of the RCP's work within the NHS and broader health sector.

We formed a Communications Reference Group, which included staff and a diverse group of members. It played a pivotal role in shaping the RCP's marketing and communications activities. Key outputs included the redesign of *Commentary* magazine, a new series of membership surveys to raise physicians' voices and shape our policy work, regular online meetings with the president, an engagement programme to shape the new strategy, and the development of good practice guidance and sign-off protocols for communications and marketing. These initiatives have not only improved the consistency and impact of our messaging but have also provided valuable feedback for ongoing improvement.

Transparency in RCP Council and Board of Trustees operations has been enhanced through the introduction of a new open section in Council meetings and the publication of Council information on our website.

We reviewed the overall management of member and other surveys to ensure quality and consistent design, sign off, analysis and wider quality assurance processes, including a methodology and standard operating procedure for surveys.

Our operational improvements have also extended to event management, with the growing adoption of a 'one programme' approach and the stronger integration of membership engagement into our flagship conferences. The transition to a new CRM (customer relationship management) system and email marketing platform in 2026 will streamline communications and improve the tracking and analysis of member interactions. These developments position the RCP to be more responsive, agile and member-focused in our day-to-day operations.

Revitalising our membership magazine

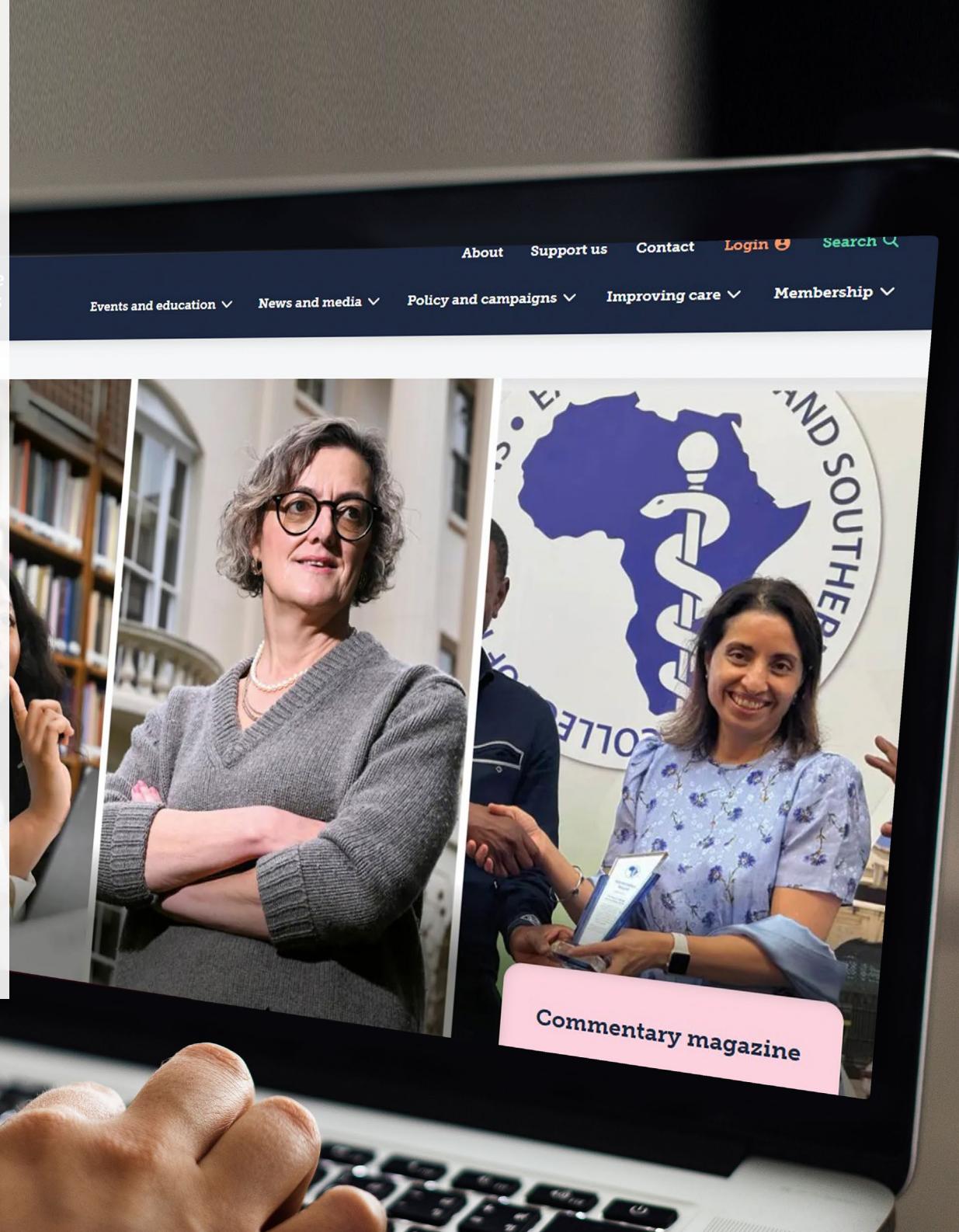


We carried out a strategic review of *Commentary*, our membership magazine, to ensure that it remains relevant and engaging to our members.

We asked members what they would like to get from their magazine via a targeted survey and in Influencing Board meetings. Responses indicated that the online format (a flipbook based on the former print design) was limited and difficult to read.

We launched a redesigned version in June 2025 offering improved digital accessibility, readability, and improved design and visual representations of the RCP's work – with plain text PDF versions of each article available for readers and archival purposes.

The new version is easier for readers to navigate and to share articles among the RCP community. It will serve as a platform to improve reader interaction, and foster a sense of community and ownership among readers. We are now creating a membership-led *Commentary* advisory group, to shape the content going forwards.



Staff and officer capacity, health and wellbeing support

Our action plan

12. Review current support services for staff and officers
13. Implement additional wellbeing programmes
14. Analyse officer and executive time commitments, providing additional support where necessary

Our achievements

Recognising the critical importance of staff and officer health and wellbeing, we have begun to explore a range of initiatives aimed at supporting capacity, resilience and mental health across the RCP.

We designed a health and wellbeing survey to identify needs but postponed initial plans to conduct it in 2025 to avoid survey fatigue. It will now be carried out in 2026.

Our aim is to develop a wellbeing programme and time management toolkit, with particular attention given to the needs of clinical volunteers and officers balancing college and substantive clinical roles. These new support tools will be guided by insights from the survey.

Capacity risks for completing our action plan – such as the ability of executive directors and senior officers to deliver change alongside existing commitments – were actively monitored through a risk and issues register. We now plan to introduce this process more widely across the RCP to identify constraints and encourage escalation to our Strategy Executive Group (SEG) in order to explore the use of external support or internal secondments when needed to achieve objectives.

Further illustrating the RCP's commitment to wellbeing, we engaged with our external employee assistance programme (EAP) provider to explore rolling out support specifically tailored to clinical roles. We will assess the feasibility of doing this in 2026.

Focus groups and internal stakeholder consultations will also inform the development of support resources, ensuring that they are relevant and accessible.

Overall, we recognise that sustained organisational performance is built on the health, wellbeing and capacity of our people. The measures we've begun to develop will now become part of our business-as-usual activities and provide a foundation for continuous improvement and resilience in the years ahead.



A focus on the next generation

The events of 2024 underlined how vital it is that we listen to the lived experience of our members and colleagues and act on their concerns. It was clear that early-career doctors in particular – the next generation of physicians – felt that the RCP was not representing them and that our processes and governance were outdated.

2025 has therefore been the year of ‘next gen’ at the RCP, with a range of initiatives focused on putting resident doctors at the heart of what we do. We launched our [next generation campaign](#), and supported our Resident Doctor Committee and Student and Foundation Doctor Network to champion crucial issues such as competition ratios, training bottlenecks and inadequate supervision. We were pleased to see many of their reflections included in the diagnostic report following the first phase of the medical training review led by the chief medical officer and former NHS England medical director.

In February we published a position statement calling for the urgent reform of postgraduate medical training. Our [national next gen survey](#) shaped both our [next gen top 10 priorities](#) for reform and our detailed response to the 10 Year Health Plan consultation. Throughout the year, we’ve amplified the voice of resident doctors across every platform.



Background to our action plan

Following the publication of The King's Fund Learning review, we set about creating an action plan with the following aims and objectives:

- To deliver a coordinated and comprehensive action plan that addresses the 10 recommendations outlined in The King's Fund review.
- To engage RCP staff, members, fellows and trustees in the co-design, development and implementation of the action plan.
- To demonstrate clear leadership via the Strategy Executive Group, which is accountable for the delivery of the action plan.
- To take a rigorous project management approach to delivery with transparent reporting to the Board of Trustees, RCP Council and staff.
- To deliver the action plan by the end of 2025, acknowledging the need for ongoing continuous improvement across all recommendations and workstreams into the long term.



Our action plan grouped 14 actions under the four main themes identified in The King's Fund review:

Theme one: Leadership, management and culture

1. Create consistency across staff and volunteer people policies
2. Review appraisal structures
3. Improve induction processes for volunteers
4. Create cultural alignment across volunteer and staff workforce
5. Develop president and chair of Board of Trustees' relationship

Theme two: Governance review

6. Commission an external review of the governance structure, including Council operations, Board of Trustees' effectiveness, standing orders and the bye-laws
7. Develop standard operating procedures for extraordinary general meetings (EGMs) and any large meetings involving fellows or members
8. Review the constitution with a focus on voting rights
9. Review the criteria for calling an EGM

Theme three: Structure and processes

10. Review and improve membership engagement and communications processes
11. Review management of member and other surveys to improve quality, consistency and design

Theme four: Staff and officer capacity, health and wellbeing support

12. Review current support services for staff and officers
13. Implement additional wellbeing programmes
14. Analyse officer and executive time commitments, providing additional support where necessary

Conclusion

One year on, our achievements under each of the four themes identified in The King's Fund independent learning review represent a significant step forward for the RCP's modernising agenda and culture transformation.

Through a structured, transparent and inclusive approach, we have strengthened our leadership, governance, operational processes and support for staff and officers. The transition to business-as-usual for many of these initiatives, supported by ongoing review cycles and feedback mechanisms, means we can sustain and build on these changes to deliver lasting improvements for our members, fellows, officers and staff.

We will incorporate these learnings from the review and transformed ways of working into our new strategy for 2026–29, providing a plan that shows how our insights and changes to work practices establish a clear roadmap for the future.



This report has been produced by members of
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