

Jono Brүүn: meet the RCP's new CEO

Jonathan (Jono) Brүүn joined the RCP as CEO in January 2026, after working in the role at the Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCoA) and the British Pharmacological Society (BPS). Dr Ollie Minton, Commentary clinical editor, speaks to him about his career journey and the challenge of a new role at the top of the RCP.

Ollie: To kick off with your CEO journey, you've come from the RCoA and the BPS. What has led you to work within medical royal colleges rather than another CEO role?

Jono: I started off not necessarily wanting to be a CEO; it's more that I was a generalist. I came from an arts background, then into communications, but I was interested in a broader management challenge.

CEOs in the charitable sector are, obviously, less motivated by stocks, shares, and profits than those working in the private sector. I started off by wanting to have an impact and to help people, so science and medicine were obvious places to start – first in pharmacology and clinical pharmacology, then into anaesthesia. As a specialty, it really interested me; it's fascinating to me that anaesthetists are willing, let alone able, to hold their patients in a state of suspension, managing their entire physiology for a brief period.

Over time, the membership element of what I do has become more and more interesting to me. I've ended up in a position where I can support a kind of virtuous circle where the patient benefits through good care from doctors, who achieve high standards of practice through organisations like the RCP, which benefit from the contributions of their members.

I've come on a journey, moving from an interest in the subject matter through to an interest in members' expertise in that subject matter. As I approach my time at the RCP, [my interest] has been refined so that it's about how I can better apply my experience to support the expertise of our members, so they in turn can better care for patients.

Ollie: The RCoA is fundamentally focused on anaesthetics. With the RCP, we've got over 30 different medical specialties – it's much more heterogeneous. If you compare and contrast the two – what do you bring from that that role?

Jono: I've learned, as someone who is not a scientist or a doctor, that the subject matter doesn't really matter. I'm

not necessarily going to have improved my knowledge of the cardiovascular system at the end of my time at the RCP. I'll pick up the odd thing, but [the focus] is not about that. It's about the management challenge.

With a single discipline, like in the RCoA (although we also looked after the faculties of pain medicine and intensive care medicine), we were able to focus in depth on those specialties – but my job is not about advancing standards or speaking on behalf of the profession. It's more like an engineering job. I have to ask myself: are the systems and structures working?

The big difference and big opportunity – one I'm really excited about – is that it's obviously more complex in a multispecialty organisation like the RCP. That complexity provides more opportunity to deliver more impact at a wider scale.

Ollie: At the RCP we have a lot of history – how are you going to be thinking about the history and traditional structures, and what are you going to be changing in the first 6 months of the job?

Jono: The RCP's history and its scope are among the big, attractive things about being here. This is the oldest, among the largest and – from my perspective – the grandest college. That's really exciting; there's so much opportunity here because of its history and because it's one of the first organisations that government turns to.

Those 500 years of getting the RCP to a point where it has 40,000 members, this beautiful estate and the ear of government make this opportunity fantastic. But I'm very aware and focused on a reset because there have been some challenges, some ongoing, that need to be addressed.

Those challenges are about the systems and function of the organisation; how efficient we are, how careful we've been with our member subscriptions.

My job is to get the mechanics working really well, so that the fantastic clinical leadership can thrive.

Ollie: As you say, fundamentally, we're a membership organisation that is standing on the shoulders of giants. But how do you continue to advocate for the membership and ensure that the college maintains all its other relationships?

Jono: Medical royal colleges and the RCP, given their traditional leadership role, are in a really tight spot at this moment in time.

The government may want you to support one direction of travel, but your membership may be pulling in another direction, with concerns from professional, career, future generation, patient safety or standards' perspectives. You will have different organisations and financial pressures pulling you around. The third factor is [our role] as a charity, because we have a public benefit. That's the investment that our members make – an investment in patient safety and public health so that patients are the ultimate beneficiary of what we do.

It's an incredibly complex role. It's going to be my job, among others, to help the RCP to remain solid, innovative and relevant, a place where our members feel represented, connected, listened to and supported, and where we can manage those broader environmental tensions with ease.

Ollie: We also want the next generation to join the RCP so that we keep representing the generational ranges of physicians. Do you have a pitch to get people to join up and stay members, and to be a more active part of the college?

Jono: The point that I would make is around contribution rather than receipt; medical royal colleges provide an unparalleled opportunity to contribute to your specialty and to the generation that's going to come after you. Without medical royal colleges, that contribution and advancement – the good clinical governance, innovation, safety and efficacy – can get lost, and there is no better organisation waiting in the wings to deliver that core purpose.

There are, of course, CPD opportunities, exams, assessment and education opportunities. There are opportunities to get involved in leadership and be elected to national posts. Those are really important. But I think it's the community and the paying it forward aspect of it, that we should recognise and celebrate. That's why members stick with organisations like RCP, in my experience. When it comes to paying their subscriptions, members are ultimately facing a binary choice: do I really want this organisation to exist? Do I think this organisation is, overall, a force for good? Would the world be better without it? That's probably what wins in the end

Ollie: You've talked about being a force for good, so what – using your engineering metaphor from earlier – would you hope to build or construct in the long term at the RCP?

Jono: I would say that I want the RCP to be the best possible version of itself. I want that for its members, the public and for policymakers.

I'd like to leave the organisation as the epitome of a well-managed, well-run modern charitable organisation.

I would like to make the area that I have control over – the middle of the organisation, its finances, resources, estates, staffing, charitable governance, the interactions and services that we offer our members – the best that they can be.

I rely on the fact that Mumtaz [Patel, RCP president] and others at the college will lead and inspire the specialties, and those working within them. If I can make the mechanics of the college better, then the specialties have more chances to thrive. That would be what I hope to achieve.

Ollie: Obviously you're settling into the role and you've got a sign up in your office that says 'deeds, not words' – the first thing that you've chosen to put up. Any significance to that?

Jono: I haven't properly settled into my office yet – that's the only picture hook so I thought that I'd pop it there. And yes, that's the challenge for me.

I don't want to be the kind of CEO who talks a good game and uses all the right language but maybe doesn't see things through, maybe doesn't live the values, maybe doesn't deliver on promises. I want to be the kind of CEO who values the progress that we make, the direction of travel, the effort that people put in and the excellence that they bring.

I've been in post less than 2 weeks, but I've been so, so impressed by the staff here – their professionalism, their desire to do the right thing for members and their hard work. ['Deeds not words'] is about them as well. I'm expecting people to make a difference, not just sit around and talk about it. Let's make something happen. Let's be proactive and productive.

My challenge to the team before I arrived was 'fix one thing'. At work, there's always going to be something that's frustrating, that doesn't function properly. Often, we can get into a state of learned helplessness where everything feels too difficult. If we're going to build a culture of excellence and conscientiousness, then it has to be a culture where we are unaccepting of poor standards, poor systems or poor performance as well. I want everyone to understand their individual responsibility to improve things as they go.

Ollie: There's great passion in what you're talking about, but you're not on call 24/7, so what do you do when you're not at work

Jono: I'll sound incredibly boring! I have three kids – I'm very passionate about them and their development. I like football, but my team is Tottenham Hotspur and we're an absolute mess, so that's not much fun at

the moment! I'm a big fan of hot yoga and I'm most comfortable being active in my spare time. I'm not very good at sitting around and twiddling my thumbs.

I really love running and I tend to do it without podcasts or music. It's a good mental health break and a good opportunity to think about things. I usually work best in an active way and tend to find solutions to problems out on a run that otherwise might baffle me! So, I'm looking forward to some long, contemplative runs in Regent's Park before heading back to the college to crack on with the job.

This feature was produced for the February 2025 edition of *Commentary* magazine. You can read a web-based version, which includes images.