



# Candidate Code of Practice for RCP elections

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1. This Code of Practice sets out how candidates in RCP elections for senior officer (including president), officer and elected councillor roles are expected to behave. It supplements the [RCP Code of Conduct](#) that applies to all RCP members, fellows and other healthcare professionals when working for or representing the RCP. Candidates should also familiarise themselves with the [RCP values](#) and the RCP social media policy.
2. The RCP reserves the right to amend the Code of Conduct, this Code of Practice and its values, subject to agreed governance process and approval of RCP Council. Any changes made during the course of an election will be communicated to all the candidates at the same time.
3. Candidates must maintain the confidentiality, integrity and good standing of the election and the RCP. They must not bring the election or the RCP into disrepute.
4. Candidates may conduct canvassing activity which speaks specifically to their qualifications, competencies and vision for the role unless expressly prohibited by this code. Canvassing means trying to persuade an elector to vote for or against a particular candidate or party, as defined by the Electoral Commission in the UK. This code provides additional clarification for RCP elections.
5. Candidates, if already part of an RCP committee, board, or Council, must respect the confidentiality of that committee, board or Council in the context of any canvassing statements.
6. The RCP supports and encourages canvassing, but it is essential that it is conducted fairly. Candidates must comply with the terms and spirit of the RCP Code of Conduct, this Code of Practice and the RCP social media policy, and act in line with the RCP values, or they may be disqualified from the election. Professional standards and expectations, such as the [GMC's Good medical practice](#), its [social media guidance for doctors](#), and doctors' own employer's social media guidance must always be followed.
  - a. The returning officer (the registrar) will be supported by a standing election panel. The panel will review and adjudicate issues or complaints raised during the election period and reserves the right to determine whether or not a candidate has breached the RCP Code of Conduct, this Code of Practice or the social media policy, or not acted in line with the RCP values, and to take appropriate steps. The role of the returning officer, the election panel and their jurisdiction is outlined in the appendix.
  - b. The decision of the election panel on all matters relating to this Code of Practice shall be final and binding on all candidates.

7. Candidates must respect and adhere to the prescribed canvassing period as agreed by Council within the election timetable. In particular:
  - a. Candidates or their supporters must not declare an intention to stand for an elected role. Nominations should remain confidential until the RCP formally announces who is standing as per the agreed election timetable.
  - b. Candidates and their supporters can only canvass within the period agreed and communicated by Council. Usually this is for a maximum of 6 weeks, overlapping with 4 weeks of polling.
  - c. Candidates should note that cessation of RCP activities will not apply during the canvassing period. This is for practical reasons and so as not to constrain the RCP's work. Specific guidance for staff and those in voluntary roles is in place at times of elections and should be noted, see the guidance on Communications and marketing during the 2026 RCP elections period.
  - d. Candidates are expected to sign a contract confirming that they have understood and will abide by the election rules. If candidates are found to have breached these rules, they will be sanctioned accordingly. Prior to the formal release of candidate lists, the rules of the election will be clearly explained to prospective candidates, including the expectation that discourse and canvassing is conducted in a civil manner.
8. Candidates must submit:
  - a. a personal statement of no more than 500 words
  - b. a summary statement of no more than 50 words.
  - c. a photograph (head and shoulders, a true likeness of the candidate and not manipulated or amended by any software)
  - d. a short CV, to a standardised format
  - e. a declaration of interests, to a standardised format.
9. Each candidate's personal 500-word statement, photograph and declaration of interests will be made available on the RCP website and the election platform hosted by Civica Election Services (CES). The CES platform will also feature a short CV for each candidate (template provided). The personal statement and summary 50-word statement will be used for RCP communication channels – such as social media, websites, online and printed bulletins and magazines, conferences and events – as appropriate and as decided by the RCP.
10. In their personal statements, candidates may include links to their own social media accounts and/or a URL to a personal website.
11. Within the election material and any wider canvassing, the electorate may be asked to vote for a candidate by making that candidate a first choice only. Ballot papers will be designed to enable a single transferable vote (STV) system where the electorate ranks their preferred candidates. Voters may mark as many or as few preferences as they wish. Additional preferences play an important role in STVs, and candidates are often elected on the basis of a large number of second or even third preferences.

12. Canvassing by candidates and their supporters on their personal social media is allowed but this must comply with the RCP Code of Conduct, this Code of Practice and the RCP social media policy, and act in line with the RCP values. Social media accounts should be apparent and unambiguously the account of the individual candidate or supporter. Anonymous accounts should not be used by candidates or their supporters – [GMC guidance](#) points out that content uploaded anonymously can, in many cases be traced back to the point of origin. Candidates may use their personal statement in their own canvassing via their own communication channels. Candidates hold a responsibility for their supporters' behaviour as well as their own – including proactively taking steps when appropriate.
13. Candidates already holding an RCP role will also be allowed to canvass via their personal accounts on social media, though they must exercise caution given the perceived advantages of their current role. See also: Communications and marketing during the 2026 RCP elections period.
14. Candidates must ensure that all statements or claims made by them, or their supporters are accurate, fair, reasonable and not misleading.
15. Candidates and their supporters are required to avoid negative comments about individuals or the RCP, in keeping with the RCP Code of Conduct for members and fellows. Social media posts and publications in general that breach the criteria of acceptability will be challenged and candidates will be asked to remove them.
16. Canvassing by personal email and phone is allowed. This must be via personal accounts only and not official/organisational channels eg RCP events or organisational newsletters. Caution must always be exercised in canvassing (from personal accounts), not to breach GDPR, and other similar data sharing/confidentiality rules/legislation.
17. Candidates or their supporters may not use RCP committee meetings or events to canvass.
18. Candidates or their supporters may not use RCP premises to hold a meeting as part of their canvassing.

## Presidential elections

19. Presidential candidates are also required to record a video statement of no more than 3 minutes. The video will be made available on the RCP website and the election platform hosted by Civica Election Services (CES). It may also be used across other RCP communication channels.
20. Presidential candidates are required to take part in a hustings event.
  - a. During the hustings event, the nature of which will be defined by RCP Council decision, candidates will be required to make a statement and answer questions.
  - b. The questions will be decided in advance by RCP Council with the president and returning officer (registrar).
  - c. The event will be chaired by an independent person appointed by the RCP.
  - d. In the event of an unplanned contested election, RCP Council reserves the right to decide the nature of the hustings, which may differ from hustings in the planned 4-year cycle.

## RCP senior officers, officers and postholders

21. The responsibilities of senior officers, officers and postholders:
- Members of the RCP Board of Trustees and senior officers (as defined under bye-law 9.1) must not nominate any candidate for election other than themselves, with the exception of members of Council acting collectively according to the bye-laws of the RCP.
  - Members of the RCP Board of Trustees, senior officers, members and attendees of Council and RCP staff must not endorse or campaign for any candidate other than themselves, with the exception of members of Council acting collectively according to the bye-laws of the RCP.
  - Members of the RCP Board of Trustees, senior officers and other volunteer postholders may encourage applicants/nominees whom they believe to be suitably qualified for the role.
  - When encouraging applications, senior officers and other volunteer postholders do so in their personal capacity.
  - Senior officers and other volunteer postholders must not use RCP committee meetings and events, RCP social media accounts, RCP email accounts or RCP mailing lists to indirectly campaign for any candidate.

## Funding

22. The RCP does not provide funding for candidates' canvassing campaigns. In the course of their canvassing, candidates must not make any financial outlay that they would not have made if they were not standing as a candidate.

## The media

23. Candidates must not conduct any canvassing through the national media or press, and nor should any comments or responses be made to journalists, the national media or press by candidates, including through social media. Candidates must not use a vehicle, such as journalistic blog pieces for a publication, to canvass. Candidates must immediately refer any media enquiries they receive, relating to their candidacy or the RCP elections, to the RCP media team via [media@rcp.ac.uk](mailto:media@rcp.ac.uk).

## Restrictions

24. In conducting their canvassing, candidates must **not**:
- use or attempt to use RCP social media accounts, RCP email accounts or RCP mailing lists
  - use RCP branding
  - pay anyone to act for them
  - enlist anyone who is not a member of the RCP to act for them
  - make any adverse personal comments about other candidates in line with the RCP [Code of Conduct](#), social media policy and values.
  - request support from any member of RCP staff
  - request information from RCP staff other than the chief executive and those identified to them as providing information to candidates

- h. accept endorsement from external organisations. External organisations must not encourage their members or affiliates to vote for any specific candidate (although they may wish to inform them that there is an election). If candidates become aware of endorsement or encouragement from an external organisation, they should inform the returning officer.
- i. canvass for any other candidate standing for any elected role for the RCP.

## **Election results**

- 25. The results for all concurrently run elections will be released at the same time – where possible on the date voting closes. Granular data regarding number of votes, vote share and turnout will be clearly signposted to the membership.

## **Post-election candidate debrief**

- 26. Candidate feedback will be sought post-election as part of the ongoing improvement of election processes.

## Appendix

### The returning officer

- a. The registrar is understood to be the returning officer under the RCP bye-laws. This is in line with the responsibility for conduct and governance invested in the registrar's position.
- b. To avert any perceived conflict of interest during elections the registrar should remove themselves completely from the process as a safeguard, ie recuse themselves from voting and remain impartial. This is especially important in presidential elections, but this caveat should apply equally to the election of senior officers and elected councillors.
- c. Should the registrar themselves stand for election then Council would allocate the role of returning officer to another individual. This would remain at Council's discretion. All the caveats above would still apply to the returning officer role.

### The standing election panel

- a. A standing election panel will be established to help mitigate any unmanageable conflicts.
- b. The panel will be chaired by the returning officer with an additional four members drawn from the senior censor, censors, councillors or other RCP officers. Should any of these individuals stand for election then an alternate senior officer/officer would be allocated to the roles, as appropriate.
- c. The election panel's main role would be to support the scrutiny of canvassing activity even when no conflicts exist for the registrar in the role of returning officer.
- d. The panel will review and adjudicate complaints received by the RCP ([concerns@rcp.ac.uk](mailto:concerns@rcp.ac.uk)) during the election period. The panel may seek extra information, clarity and evidence from those raising concerns and where necessary individual candidates to fully consider a matter. Once all necessary information is available the panel will aim to make a judgement within 72 hours.
- e. The panel will assess complaints against the terms and spirit of the RCP Code of Conduct, this Code of Practice, the RCP social media policy and the RCP values.
- f. The panel will:
  - Adjudicate if a minor or major breach has occurred recognising that persistent or repeated minor breaches may result in a major breach.
  - Examples of a major breach would include (but are not limited to) poor behaviour, harassment, candidates prematurely announcing their candidature to gain an advantage before the agreed 6-week canvassing window and canvassing for other candidates – including urging candidates to stand down.
  - Examples of a minor breach would include (but are not limited to) inappropriate or inaccurate social media or website posts, candidates not doing enough to control negative canvassing by their supporters, using RCP branding in personal social media canvassing.
  - Prior to the formal release of candidate lists by the RCP, the rules of the election will also be clearly explained to prospective candidates at a briefing. The expectation is that discourse and canvassing is conducted in a civil manner. Illustrative examples will be provided of what constitutes a breach, and a contact point for candidates to ask for advice on election rules and guidance.

- g. Possible actions by the panel include:
  - a request to amend, remove or clarify social media, webpage or other canvassing content
  - raising concerns about supporter behaviours and seeking candidate intervention
  - any other action deemed appropriate according to the concern raised.
- h. Possible sanctions include:
  - a private warning – with caveat that if repeated or other transgressions identified may result in a major breach
  - a public written warning – to be listed on the RCP and CES websites
  - disqualification of candidature in cases of a major breach – to be listed on the RCP and CES websites.
- i. The decision of the election panel on all matters relating to this Code of Practice shall be final and binding on all candidates.
- j. Candidates who fail to conduct themselves accordingly may be subject to the established disciplinary mechanisms of the RCP.

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