



Communications and marketing during the 2026 RCP elections

Guidance for staff and those in voluntary roles

This guidance is to make staff in communications, marketing, policy, membership and events roles, and the wider organisation, fully aware of the rules surrounding RCP elections. It provides information on what to consider when carrying out day-to-day activities. The upcoming elections cover the senior censor and vice president for education and training, vice president for Wales and councillor roles.

The guidance is also intended to support fellows standing for election, in relation to the service they should expect from within the RCP during this period.

The election arrangements for 2026 – including the timeline and supporting guidance have been approved by RCP Council and are aimed at creating a level playing field for all candidates.

Documentation is available on the [elections section](#) of the RCP website. The election timetable is also included in section 5 of this guidance.

We want everyone to feel confident when communicating about the elections and able to identify any conflicts or concerns they may have. This is particularly important for staff who may already be working closely with RCP fellows who run for office.

1. Election arrangements and Candidate Code of Practice

Guidance to candidates on canvassing and positive opportunities for engagement

The updated Code of Practice is designed to allow a level playing field in which the RCP encourages a fair promotion of candidates' views and profiles, giving each of them equity of access to resources and to the whole electorate using the RCP website and the online election platform – hosted by Civica Election Services (CES). This provides a clear framework to candidates standing for election and a clear explanation to the electorate on the current rules regarding elections.

Positive opportunities for engagement/campaigning are encouraged to inform and engage the electorate. All canvassing activity should be in line with the Candidate Code of Practice for RCP elections, the RCP Code of Conduct, the RCP social media policy and this guidance – Communications and marketing during the 2026 RCP elections.

Staff are encouraged to read the following documents, available on the [elections section](#) of the RCP website:

- Election arrangements 2026 – including timeline
- Candidate Code of Practice for RCP elections
- RCP Code of Conduct
- RCP social media policy

In addition, Council has agreed a defined 6-week period for campaigning/canvassing:

Canvassing will only be possible within a defined 6-week period, which starts 2 weeks before voting opens and continues for the 4 weeks when voting is open. The RCP will announce the lists of candidates at the start of the 6-week period and release the election material, as indicated above, on our website. Candidates and their supporters are prohibited from beginning canvassing before this announcement is made. The public announcement of candidates by the RCP should be the first notification to the electorate of who is standing.

2. RCP and staff responsibilities

The RCP is responsible for promoting candidates and giving each of them equity of access to resources and to the whole electorate. It is important that staff work together to ensure that the election process is fair. The list of candidates will be announced on 16 February 2026 (provisional date), after review by RCP Council.

During the elections, the organisation will continue to run as usual. Once the list of candidates is published, any candidates currently in RCP roles, for example officers, will continue in role and work to deliver their usual associated tasks. This may include work they lead on being communicated via RCP communications channels, eg promoting a session at a conference via an email newsletter.

However, candidates currently in RCP roles should not receive extra opportunities that go beyond the remit of their usual role. Communications from the RCP must never promote one candidate over another.

Staff should not give additional support or advice to individual candidates where their candidacy may benefit from that campaigning, communication, marketing or policy expertise. Serving officers who are standing for election are not prohibited from using RCP communications channels during elections where the content is relevant to their current role and agreed programme of work, but that activity should not link to the election.

Similarly, RCP staff may follow candidates' own social media accounts. Before you engage with (eg share, 'like' or comment on) a post by a candidate, please consider whether it could give them an advantage or is strictly necessary at that time.

If you have concerns about any promotion you see relating to a candidate or activity by RCP colleagues that you believe is outside this guidance, please raise this with your line manager.

3. Campaigning and the use of social media

The use of personal social media is permissible by candidates (as is personal email and phone), but only once the list of candidates is made public by the RCP. The candidate code states that 'Candidates may conduct canvassing activity which speaks specifically to their qualifications, competencies and vision for the role unless expressly prohibited by this code'.

There are some restrictions, including candidates not requesting support from RCP staff in relation to their election campaign:

Funding: 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: 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 platform, 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.

Other restrictions

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 and RCP social media policy and RCP 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
- 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.
- canvass for any other candidate standing for any elected role for the RCP.

Staff are reminded that any text about candidates that goes out via central RCP channels must be approved by Membership Support and Global Engagement (MSGE) and Communications, Policy & Research (CP&R).

In relation to personal social media usage, Council has emphasised the following to candidates:

- The use of social media should conform to set standards of behaviour and be in line with RCP social media policy. In effect, candidates for office should act as if they were already elected and in post.
- There is a requirement to avoid negative comments about individuals or the RCP, in keeping with the RCP Code of Conduct for members and fellows.
- Social media posts that breach the criteria of acceptability will be challenged and candidates may be requested to amend, remove or clarify social media, webpage or other canvassing content.
- Canvassing by candidates and their supporters that breaches the criteria of acceptability will be challenged.
- Candidates who fail to conduct themselves accordingly may receive a public warning or be disqualified from an election.
- Candidates may also be subject to the established disciplinary mechanisms of the RCP.

The full social media policy is available on the [elections section](#) of the RCP website.

4. Considerations for day-to-day campaigns, communications, events, marketing and policy work during elections

Conferences and events

- Candidates can be chairs/speakers at events such as conferences and the Update in medicine series of events; however, the focus will remain on the clinical content, not the person. The person will not be promoted individually, but it is appropriate to include when promoting a full session. This rule of thumb is applicable to online events presence too.
- Candidates can be abstract judges at events; however, the focus will remain on the clinical work. No promotion is required for judges.
- When mentioning candidates in social media posts, this should relate to the event, not the election. Candidates should be mentioned whether they have social media accounts or not.

Media

- Candidates who already hold positions of office at the RCP (eg special advisers or vice presidents) can provide quotes to media or be interviewed by the media if asked to do so by the RCP's media team, but this should only be in their capacity as an RCP spokesperson and under no circumstances should it be in relation to the RCP election.
- The above also applies to blog posts and podcasts hosted on the RCP website.
- Non-election-related media activity, such as media statements, blog posts and podcasts, involving spokespersons who are also candidates can be published via the RCP social media channels. However, the elections or their candidacy, should not be mentioned in these posts.

Membership and committee communications

- *Commentary* magazine/editorial features featuring candidates – no re-promotion of any previous features in past editions that prominently platform candidates. No special features, news articles or columns by individual candidates in the standard February/March edition. Elections and candidates can be covered in governance or specific election news.
- Bespoke emails – candidates cannot send emails specifically about the elections.
- Email writers cannot endorse a candidate.
- Email writers cannot mention who is standing for election other than in official elections communications and promotion.
- General emails – any business-as-usual work and projects being carried out by candidates can be mentioned or promoted.

Where candidates are listed in election-related communications, via any medium, staff must ensure that each name listed is given equal prominence and that individuals are listed alphabetically by surname.

5. Elections timeline

Please note the following key dates in the elections timetable:

Elections timetable 2025/26

4 December 2025	Nominations open
6 January 2026	Nominations close
28 January 2026	Council to review nominations received and inform nominees of eligibility to stand.
6 February 2026	Deadline for submission of election material to the RCP by candidates.
16 February 2026 (provisional date)	Public announcement of candidates in all elections – including access to candidates' 500-word statement and photograph on the RCP website. Candidates and their supporters are prohibited from beginning canvassing before the announcement is made by the RCP.
2 March 2026	Voting opens, Civica Election Services (CES) to send voting invitation emails to all eligible voters. CES voting platform to include all candidate submitted election material.
30 March 2026 (College Day)	Online voting closes at midday in all elections.
30/31 March 2026	Public announcement of election results
ASAP after results	Successful vice president candidates to take up office with a tenure until 31 July 2029. Council has approved a short extension to the usual 3-year tenure for these roles to cover business need and return elections to the recognised annual timetable.
1 August 2026	Successful councillor candidates to take up office with a tenure until 31 July 2029.

6. Who to contact for advice

This guidance is not exhaustive and staff may encounter a situation that is not covered. For further support or information, please contact:

- Executive director and deputy director, CP&R, Claire Burroughs and Lowri Jackson
- Executive director, MSGE, Matthew Foster
- Head of professional governance, Simon Land
- Registrar (who has the role of election returning officer), Dr Omar Mustafa

November 2025

Due to be reviewed: annually