

RCPsych EGM Analysis 2022 – Summary Report of Free Text Responses

The following summary report details the responses to a consultation run via the RCPsych website. The consultation was open to members from 21st July to 15th August 2022 and asked for feedback on two proposals, as shown below:

Feedback on proposal: *That Affiliates, who have been working as a psychiatrist for at least three years, become entitled to vote in general meetings and elections of the College.* [Non-mandatory free text box with 500-word limit]

Feedback on proposal: *Provision to be made for us to be able to hold virtual meetings of the College including General and Special Meetings as a matter of course, without the need to seek specific agreement from the Trustee Board* [Non-mandatory free text box with 500-word limit]

In total, there were 115 responses to the two proposals. A data integrity check found that one response was a duplicate (an identical response), and it was therefore removed from the analysis. The **final number of responses is therefore 114.**

Section 1: Summary of Responses (in favour/not in favour)

Looking at responses to the two proposals put forward, both receive more votes in favour than not in favour (shown in the table below).

- The vast majority of respondents (**89%**) are in favour of the **Virtual Meetings** proposal.
- There is a more even split regarding the **extension of voting rights to Affiliates (54% in favour vs 43% not in favour).**

	In favour	Not In Favour	Unsure / No Response
Affiliate voting rights	61	49	4
Virtual meetings	101	9	4

Section 2: Extension of voting rights to Affiliates

Looking at the responses by membership grade, a resounding majority (all but one) of **Affiliates** are **in favour of the extension of voting rights**. **Fellows and Members** are on balance **not in favour**; however the margin is very small.

A full breakdown of scores can be found below:

- Fellows: **15/34** In Favour vs **18/34** Not In Favour
- Members: **25/56** In Favour vs **28/56** Not In Favour
- Affiliates: **16/17** In Favour vs **1/17** Not In Favour
- Other¹: **5/7** In Favour vs **2/7** Not In Favour

¹ Member grades included in 'Other' include PMPT and Specialist Associates (7 responses in total).

The common arguments for being **in favour** of the extension of voting rights to Affiliates are as follows:

- The belief that giving Affiliates voting rights **supports inclusivity**. Some cite that such a move is **essential for parity and equality** within the profession, with some mentioning it is overdue. The desire to see the College as one that is more inclusive is often the cited reason by those **Fellows** and **Members** who are in favour of the proposal.
 - *“I am in favour of this. It supports the inclusivity drive and gives a professional voice to those who are core components of our workforce.” (Fellow)*
 - *“I agree. I might not be able to make the AGM, but if I could vote otherwise, I would vote in favour of this. I think this change is necessary and probably overdue. I have for quite some time been concerned that those with certain characteristics might suffer indirect disadvantage when activities such as those listed remain limited as per the current situation.” (Member)*
 - *“I agree with this statement, wholeheartedly. This will bring parity to psychiatrists in the system.” (Member)*
 - *“I definitely back this as SAS Drs have a wealth of experience which would benefit the College and help ensure the College’s voice truly represents all psychiatrists, not just ones that have their UK membership exams. The RCPsych needs to project a united voice that is as inclusive and diverse as our psychiatric workforce.” (Member)*
- **Affiliates** meanwhile are typically in favour of this proposal because they believe they - as a group - have **contributed a lot to patients, the profession, and the College** and have not always been recognised. Extension of their voting rights is seen as a small act of respect.
 - *“It’s only fair that Affiliate members are allowed to vote, who contribute so much to service provision and training and towards college.” (Affiliate)*
 - *“Yes. SAS doctors have been the backbone of the NHS workforce. They deserve better.” (Affiliate)*
 - *“I have little faith in the future at present, especially when trainees also belittle and speak against SAS doctors and are groomed to feel this is OK and that they are special. These are the people, the many people, who undermine, harass and bully SAS doctors at work, day in day out, mentioned in the many reports over many years. A culture perpetuating itself, and a College that does not act to break it. My right to vote is a small act of respect from those I see as my colleagues, some of whom do not see me as their colleague. If it comes in September, it will be bittersweet because of what has happened.” (Affiliate)*

Other reasons for being in favour of the extension of voting rights include:

- The belief that it will **increase engagement and participation in the College and its activities**.
 - *“Further encourage SAS colleagues to get involved with College agendas, help with retention and workforce planning.” (Member)*

- *“Believe it will promote greater engagement in the College activities due to a greater sense of belonging and ownership.” (Affiliate)*
- Non-Affiliates also note that **Affiliates are trusted colleagues**, who perform a similar role and have similar experience and should not be excluded in the decision-making process of RCPsych. (This is another commonly cited reason amongst Affiliates themselves.)
 - *“I have a lot of respect and admiration for them. Many are consultants without papers, who get paid 30K less than me and do the same job.” (Member)*
 - *“The Affiliates are trusted colleagues, and they should be included in the decision making.” (Member)*
- It is also important to highlight that some Fellows, **whilst in favour of the vote, do still hold a few concerns**. For example, there is some concern from this group that Affiliates might become the majority member grade and what this would mean for the College in terms of trust/setting standards. Further, it is also mentioned by some that those that have undertaken the MRCPsych exam should have a weighted voting rights.

The common arguments for **not being in favour of the extension of voting rights** are as follows:

- The **primary concern** is that **Affiliates have not demonstrated the same competencies** as Members and Fellows have. Extension of voting rights will **dilute and devalue the hard work Members and Fellows have put in and pose a potential risk to standards**.
 - *“I disagree with this proposal as it disregards the importance of the membership exam.” (Fellow)*
 - *“This is a terrible idea. A main purpose of the College is to distinguish doctors who are competent and properly trained in psychiatry from those who are not. This may sound harsh, but this is what it does. It makes no sense to lump together non-specialists with specialists. Doing so would further diminish the standing of psychiatrists in the public's eye. If there are any issues for which the interests of members and non-members differ then it is the views of the members which should hold sway. The outcomes of votes should reflect the wishes of the members.” (Fellow)*
 - *“I do not agree with this proposal. Current members obtained their voting right after fulfilling stringent membership requirements (exams, which reflect a certain level of psychiatric training/knowledge/commitment to the profession).” (Member)*
- Furthermore, it is felt that such a move could **downgrade the value of full membership**; some believe that it would **reduce the motivation for Affiliates to strive for full membership**.
 - *“I think this is inappropriate and downgrades the value of full membership. What would be the point in becoming a College Member?” (Fellow)*
 - *“I do not have an issue with Affiliates voting on certain topics, but certainly we should be driving people to become Members, otherwise why be Members and not remain as Affiliates?” (Member)*

Following on from the point above, some believe it is **unfair on those** who pay for full membership.

- *“I don't think this is fair at all. Why can't these doctors sit the MRCPsych examinations and pay the regular membership fees like the rest of us have been doing for decades?”*
(Member)
- Those not in favour also ask the question **‘where would it stop?’**, fearing that the expansion of voting rights would only be the ‘tip of the iceberg’.
 - *“If entitled to vote, why should they not also be allowed to stand for election?”*
(Fellow)
 - *“Were we to make this change, it would be only a matter of time before there was a push to widen still further the voting rights.”* **(Member)**

Section 3: Virtual meetings as a matter of course

All membership grades are **clearly in favour** of this proposal, as shown below:

- Fellows: **28**/34 In Favour vs **5**/34 Not In Favour
- Members: **51**/56 In Favour vs **2**/56 Not In Favour
- Affiliates: **16**/17 In Favour vs **1**/17 Not In Favour
- Other: **6**/7 In Favour vs **1**/7 Not In Favour

The common arguments for those **in favour** of this proposal are as follows:

- The belief that **virtual meetings will improve accessibility** and thus **broaden participation** in the College.
 - *“The way in which we all attend meetings has been changed by Covid and it has been shown that virtual meetings attract a far wider audience than meetings available by attendance only. Virtual attendance for all College meetings should be made available. This outdated requirement for Trustee Board approval should be scrapped.”* **(Fellow)**
 - *“Please do this, it makes it much easier for all of us who're from the north of the country, have health problems or have caring responsibilities.”* **(Member)**
 - *“Virtual meetings would make it more practical and allow more colleagues to attend the meetings and be part of major decision-making processes.”* **(Affiliate)**
- Respondents also note that the post-pandemic world already has shifted to online meetings and therefore **the College also is simply moving with the times.**
 - *“The pandemic has at least provided us with this unique opportunity of holding remote meetings which should be utilised to its full potential.”* **(Member)**

- *“It’s the 21st century, we’ve lived through a pandemic, and we need to reduce unnecessary travel for the environment. Why wasn’t this changed two years ago?!!” (Member)*
- A large proportion of respondents also cite the **environmental benefits** that can be achieved by using virtual meetings.
 - *“Absolutely agree - anything to increase involvement and reduce unnecessary expense and improve the environmental impact of College meetings.” (Member)*

Amongst the very small minority that are **not in favour** of virtual meetings, the most frequent comments focus on remote meetings **reducing the ability for real debates and discussions**. Some are suspicious that this is the real reason for the proposal.

- *“I am completely opposed to virtual meetings and have no trust in the current regime to carry these out fairly. I suspect it is to avoid open debate at which the leadership does not excel and clearly cannot handle.” (Fellow)*
- *“While I agree this would improve access - it would also degrade the quality of debate and make it easier for Royal College senior staff to force through their own personal views, with it harder for others to challenge them. No doubt this is a large part of why the College supports these measures to such an extent.” (Affiliate)*