

RCOT Council Meeting

Approved minutes of meeting held 23 January 2025

Held on 23 January 2025, via Teams

Council members present	
Name	Position
Aisling Durkin	Trustee, Northern Ireland
Jackie Gordon	Trustee, England
Neil Carnegie	Trustee, Scotland
Cathryn Holding	Trustee, Industrial relations
Dr Sureshkumar Kamalakannan	Trustee, International Affairs
Paul Dunning	Trustee, Wales
Janine Hackett	Trustee, Learning and Development
Odeth Richardson	Trustee, Chair
Also in attendance	
Regular attendees (attended all items except confidential items)	
Clare Cochrane	Director of Brand and Marketing
Kate Monro	Head of Governance and Compliance
CJ Odeleye	Head of Finance
Karin Orman	Director of Practice and Innovation
Satvinder Reyatt	Director of People, Finance and Governance
Rob Smyth	Director of Strategy, Technology and Transformation
Other attendees	
Angela Daniel	Senior Business Support Partner, minute taker
Ruth Mullan	Head of Membership Experience & Services
Joe Brunwin	Policy and Public Affairs Lead – England
Cliona McCarney	Policy and Public Affairs Lead - Northern Ireland
Dai Davies	Professional Practice Lead – Wales
Katie MacGregor	Policy & Public Affairs Lead- Scotland
Thea Healy	Head of Profile and Campaigns
Savana China	Head of Inclusion and Involvement
Sankeetha Nadarajah	Managing Editor - BJOT
Apologies	
Steve Ford	Chief Executive
Dr Anita Atwal	Trustee, Research and Development

Please note: Items are recorded in agenda item order rather than the order in which they were taken.

Item	Main point	Action
1.	Meeting business	
1.1	Declaration of conflict of interest No declarations were made.	
1.2	Approval of RCOT Board of Trustee minutes Resolution: the Board approved the 10 October 2024 RCOT Board of Trustee minutes subject to an amendment to AOB to state that Suresh Kamalakannan (SK) requested information on the RCOT representative for the European Congress and expressed he represented international events as a member of international affairs. Action: AD to amend 10 October minutes.	ADaniel
2.	Standing management reports	
2.i	CEO report – presented by Director of People, Finance and Governance Jackie Gordon (JG) expressed gratitude for the compliments received by the professional advisory service and the library team. She suggested that these resources, which are core membership benefits, should be highlighted more, especially since many younger OTs are unaware of them. The challenge of ensuring public figures accurately represent occupational therapy was discussed in relation to a blog which mentioned “exercises” given by an OT. There was concern that this might dilute the occupational therapy message, as exercises are often associated with physiotherapy. Campaign activities are done in consultation with practice and innovation teams and occupational therapists. Public figures speak authentically about their experiences, which can mean that they do not always use exact terminology. While efforts are made to minimise this, the importance of maintaining genuine relationships with supporters and avoiding scripting them was highlighted. Despite inaccuracies, the goal is to celebrate occupational therapists' work and reach a broader audience, encouraging them to learn more about the profession.	
2.ii	Performance report – presented by Director of Strategy, Technology and Transformation New indicators agreed upon by trustees are now being reported from October to December. Performance across most indicators is in line with or exceeds expectations, however we know there are still areas of challenge. Monitoring continues, with SLT reviewing reports monthly across corporate and operational indicators.	

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2.iii	The SLT will now also report quarterly on the actions for the workforce strategy and the associated action plans. The final two country action plans are expected to be delivered and published this quarter. Risk report – presented by Head of Governance and Compliance The Board noted key movements since the last Audit, Investment & Risk Committee (AIR) and Board review. A new risk concerning capacity was identified, while some existing risks were successfully reduced. The risk register and summary dashboard were discussed thoroughly at the AIR Committee meeting held in early December.	
2.iv	The Board discussed the potential impact of financial pressures on recruitment and retention and SLT assured the Board that there are plans in place to mitigate this risk. The Board recognised the need for ongoing communications between themselves and SLT regarding significant changes to organisational resources. communication with the Board to ensure they are promptly informed when key staff members resign was identified. Membership growth report – presented by the Head of Member Experience The Board received an update on the membership growth programme, detailing performance against targets for Q1 2024, actions taken to mitigate attrition risks, and priorities for Q2 2024/2025. • The total membership grew by 918 new members, reaching 36,924, with a market share of 68.2%. However, this total is prior to our 'red button' event (the removal of members who have not paid their fees for more than three months) which will decrease our membership number overall. • While most categories exceeded targets, are figures are lower for professional member and overseas member categories. • Renewals were ongoing, with efforts to reduce arrears and support members in financial difficulty. • Key activities in Q1 included launching a membership growth programme, developing new dashboards, and establishing a volunteer network. • Priorities for Q2 include delivering renewals, creating new member value propositions, and launching a membership growth campaign. • The CPD portfolio had received positive feedback from apprentices and students. Board feedback included the following suggestions: • Leveraging existing communities and volunteers to promote RCOT membership at fresher events for occupational therapy students, particularly in Scotland where there are only four HEIs offering such courses. • Greater student membership discounts during term time to increase student buy-in and reduction of membership fees for the recently qualified.	

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2.v	• Motivational videos for induction programs at HEIs to highlight the benefits of RCOT membership. • Tailored strategies for student membership, considering the different needs of first-year, final-year, BSc, MSc, and PhD students. Noting there were gaps in teaching occupational therapy students about the UK healthcare system and how to engage with it. • Consideration of whether specific strategies for international memberships were required. RM left the meeting Finance report – presented by the Head of Finance The Board received the financial update, starting with results for the 2023-24 financial year: • The original budget for the year was a £0.5 million deficit, but a recovery plan was approved due to income challenges. • Against the recovery plan, the year ended with both income (£10.7 million) and spend at £12.3m off target. Overall result for the year is therefore a deficit of £1.6 million. • Key areas driving the (£179k) overspend included the NHS England project, OT week promotional materials, recruitment videos, and winding up the final salary pension scheme. • Taking the results of the year into account, a £150K deficit budget was agreed for the current year. We have brought our spending position back in line with income levels and revised our growth assumptions to target a more conservative increase in member numbers. • Whilst it's still early in the new financial year, our plans are currently on track, however there are likely to be some challenges. Income is currently tracking in line with budget but there was a slight overspend due to staffing changes, legal advice, and IT licenses in the period. Investments had also rebounded as markets stabilised. The practice of using reserves to cover deficits was discussed. It was stated that historically we have had a significant reserves position, requiring us to maintain reserves between £5 and £8 million, with £5 million as the lower limit. Currently, reserves are below this limit, but the policy allows temporary deviation with Board's approval. A recovery plan was in place to align costs with income and eventually replenish the reserves. This was year two of the plan, and while not on track, the recovery plan aimed to stabilise finances and rebuild reserves next financial year. SR advised the Board to look at the AIR Committee report which has more detail on the transformational journey and further information can be shared after the meeting in March. Board members were invited to observe the AIR Committee meetings if they wished. Further clarification was provided on overspend factors, which included: • An audit requirement to include a holiday accrual provision • An agreement to reimburse the trust that the Chair worked for, backdated to 2022, and	

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2.vi	- The cost of providing private medical insurance for staff, which had a tax element omitted from the budget. - The Board were assured that the current year's budgeting process was more robust and included all necessary provisions. SK enquired about the plans for revenue generation from occupational therapy-related activities. CJO confirmed that this being considered through the commercial programme. The AIR Committee had reviewed data on sustainability to understand the challenges related to our banking arrangements and their implications. RCOT are currently compiling research to report back to the AIR Committee, which will then decide on the next steps. The rationale for the spend on recruitment fees was questioned given RCOT's small size and limited recruitment capacity. It was explained that due to the high volume of hiring, RCOT had partnered with an external recruitment specialist as a one-off. Recruitment was now largely run utilising internal expertise, only partnering with agencies for roles requiring specialist expertise. Strategic programmes update – presented by the Director of Strategy, Technology and Transformation The Board were provided with an update on the progress of RCOT's four priority programmes: digital transformation, membership growth, commercial income maximisation, and professional leadership. Each programme had a detailed delivery plan and a formal governance structure to ensure ambitious plans were met. - The digital transformation programme had made significant progress, including the development of a new CRM system and website. - The membership growth programme welcomed 918 new members in the first quarter and launched several initiatives. - The commercial growth programme is focusing on developing new partnerships in the short term and a review of our commercial strategy. - The professional leadership programme was being developed and set to launch in early 2025. Additionally, enabling projects and improvement activities were created to support these programmes, focusing on leadership development, health and wellbeing, and colleague engagement.	
3.	'MyRCOT' launch – presented by Director of Strategy, Technology and Transformation and Director of Brand and Marketing The Board were updated on the member experience programme delivering a range of technology projects to provide a more responsive and tailored experience. The Board received a demonstration of the new digital experience, including the new website, portal, and key member platforms. Trustees	

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	gained a better understanding of the digital offer and experience, saw the new CRM system, and learned how the forthcoming digital contact centre would work. The launch process was discussed, along with how Trustees could be involved in further testing and development. Action: CC and RS were asked to email trustees details of the approach to communications and measuring impact of the systems due to time constraints in the meeting. It was confirmed the decision had been made not to opt for an RCOT app but focus our efforts on delivering a single integrated experience that will work well on all platforms, including mobile devices. Action: RS to confirm if an offline version will be made available. The Chair asks trustees to email any remaining questions to CC and RS.	CC/RS RS
4.	RCOT – our strategic influencing priorities Joe Brunwin, Policy and Public Affairs Lead – England, Dai Davies, Professional Practice Lead – Wales, Cliona McCarney, Policy and Public Affairs Lead - Northern Ireland, Katie MacGregor, Policy & Public Affairs Lead- Scotland, and Thea Healy, Head of Profile and Campaigns join this item. KO introduced the team who updated trustees on their current activities: • The Workforce Strategy action plan for England was launched during OT week, with a survey conducted to understand workforce diversity and pressures, to be repeated biennially. Progress included consultations on the research and innovation strategy, a lecture series, and a project to make schools more inclusive. • In England, responses were submitted to the 10 year health plan consultation, and a proposal for effective staffing resources was agreed upon. • In Wales, the action plan was promoted through engagements with key officials. • In Northern Ireland, relationships were built, and the workforce action plan was finalised. • In Scotland, efforts focused on understanding budget cuts' impact and securing funding for equipment. • Two NHSE-funded programmes were on target and within budget. Lectures on the complexity of occupation were delivered, with plans for masterclasses and workshops. The Research and Innovation strategy consultation was completed, and pre-registration education research identified enablers and barriers to placement capacity and quality. Discussions followed on:	

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	- Priorities for advancing the profession's knowledge base and the need to gather and share information to promote occupational therapy locally. KO explained the matrix of work involved, including the influencing cafe and the communities platform, which would support members in sharing good practice examples and stories. - The importance of evidence showing occupational therapy's impact on reducing hospital stays and care packages. The need to draw on international evidence was noted, along with exploring commercial activities like health economics courses for members. - Supporting members to use broader evidence and the collaborative efforts of different directorates to highlight the profession's value. KO informed the Board that Dai Davies would be leaving RCOT in April and wanted to thank him for all his hard work over the years. It was also announced that Joe Brunwin would be stepping up to a seconded role as UK Policy and Public Affairs Manager.	
5.	RCOT high profile events – presented by the Director of Brand and Marketing At the RCOT Board meeting in October 2024, the Board had expressed a strong preference for including in-person elements in the high-profile events programme for the financial year. The events planned for 2024-25 included the Elizabeth Casson Memorial Lecture, Members' Day, AGM, and a new Specialism Conference. The Members' Day, scheduled for 17 June 2025, was highlighted as a key in-person event, potentially in Edinburgh or Belfast. The event would introduce the new communities model. The Board also discussed plans for a return to full in-person annual conferences, with the earliest possible date being Spring 2026. Trustees raised the following points: - International member attendance at the AGM and whether there would be a specific session for international OTs. SK volunteered to support this. - All UK nations were evaluated as potential locations for Members' Day, with careful consideration given to accessibility and costs. - Effective communication with members needs to be prioritised. Action: SK and JH volunteered to support thinking for the members' day and conference. CC to reach out.	CC
6.	EDB: focus on progress report – presented by the Head of Inclusion and Involvement Savania China (SC) joined the meeting.	

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	SR introduced SC who presented the slides on EDB updates and activities, including: • In October, RCOT hosted a follow-up session on the Reflection Session from the summer riots, which members found engaging and appreciated. • An Insight Session on Menopause was held, covering the basics and its impact on black women, coinciding with Black History Month. • A special Black History edition of OT News was published, featuring 22 pages and over 16 articles by members of black heritage. • Internally, RCOT made progress on key projects, including hiring a third party to ensure the new website's accessibility, transitioning EDB Expert Advisory Groups to the new Communities Platform, and updating policies to incorporate EDB considerations. • An EDB toolkit was published, and a full review of collected diversity data began, with colleagues set to self-report their data on the new People system in April. Trustees highlighted the following points: • The appointment of a trustee to champion EDB would be beneficial. • EDB should be integrated into every Board paper, rather than being a standalone agenda item. • The potential to add further diversity to the Board could enhance diversity and provide different perspectives. This aligns with the recommendations from the Governance Review and discussions from the People and Nominations Committee. • A concern was raised about discrimination faced by internationally trained occupational therapists in the UK, as highlighted by NHS Trust audits. The EDB initiative should address the issues faced by members from international practitioner backgrounds during their practice. • A conversation highlighted the need to address unconscious bias and prejudice among placement educators, particularly given the growing diversity of students. Additionally, a recent meeting with a group from Able OT revealed concerning experiences during placements. The discussion emphasised the importance of improving standards and working with employers to ensure all students have positive placement experiences, regardless of their background or disability. • KO informs the Board on the work around looking at conversations with employees to understand the new generation of occupational therapists coming through; and workforce modelling. Action: KM to add an EDB section within the summary on the Board paper template. Action: PNC to consider EDB skills and representation as part of repeat of skills audit exercise. The Chair asks Board members to contact SC and SR with additional comments or questions.	KM KM

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7.	CONFIDENTIAL: OT News – presented by Director of Brand and Marketing	
8.	RCOT lay trustee recruitment 2025 and draft recruitment process – presented by Head of Governance and Compliance The Board heard that the skills audit of the Board run by the People and Nominations Committee had concluded and that the Committee recommended that the Board address gaps in its collective skills by recruiting four lay trustees with skills in finance/commercial, digital/marketing, volunteering/membership and legal/compliance. The People and Nominations Committee discussed whether to recruit to all four roles at once or stagger this and were of the view that the Board should test the market for candidates across all four roles. It may be that the Board would be unable to recruit to all roles with the first recruitment campaign. The next steps included drafting role descriptions, forming a recruitment panel, and developing a process for future trustee and committee member appointments. It was agreed that timeframes needed to be revisited to avoid conflicts with other role campaigns and other strategic priorities and to consider different channels due to the varied skill sets required for the roles. Concerns were raised about the potential risk of losing the membership voice within these posts, with a response noting that the roles stemmed from the governance review and changes made to the articles in June. It was explained that the decision aimed to bring in external expertise to complement the existing OT expertise. There was a question about whether the OT voice on Council would be weakened during Council voting, and it was noted this had been considered during the governance review and the ratio of OT to lay trustees was protected in the Articles. It was added that OTs could apply for these roles. Resolution: the Board approved – 1. Recruitment to four lay trustee roles with skillsets focussed on finance/commercial, digital/marketing, volunteering/membership and legal/compliance. 2. The draft recruitment process. Delegation of authority to the Panel to carry out recruitment in line with the approved process. The Panel shall be formed in line with the approved process and volunteers for the Panel will be sought immediately following the Council meeting.	
9.	Fellowship and Merit Awards 2025 – presented by Head of Member Experience and Services	

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	RM joined the meeting. The RCOT Fellowship and Merit awards had been reviewed to ensure they were fit for purpose, inclusive, and aligned with RCOT's mission and strategic priorities. The review, conducted from July to September 2024, involved examining existing documentation, gathering member feedback, researching best practices, and engaging an internal working group. Key findings highlighted issues in the application process, governance, communication, and accessibility. Immediate recommendations included anonymising applications, publishing a clear timeline, and developing a Fellowship role profile. Future actions proposed software improvements, diversity data collection, and enhanced support for applicants. The 2025 application window was shortened and postponed to accommodate these changes. The review aimed to make the awards more inclusive, accessible, and representative, with a revised timeline and next steps for the Board's consideration. Clarification was sought on whether the inclusion of a three-year application window would be reflected in the role profile before publication. RM proposed introducing the three-year gap from the next year to ensure fairness, as applicants might not be aware of it. It was suggested to include a note about the upcoming change in the form to inform applicants and emphasise the need for development during the gap period. Action: trustees to share details about the Fellowship and Merit Awards with colleagues because of the shortened window this year. RM left the meeting.	Trustees
10.	Draft sustainability plan The Board discussed the potential themes for a future draft sustainability plan. RS would return to a future Board meeting with a more comprehensive agenda item on sustainability and climate change to discuss potential actions and agree the next steps. JG expressed support for the ongoing work, offering to contribute to the plan and enquired about collaboration with the Chief AHP Office's Green Partnership Group and the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change. KO responded that we have no plans in the current budget for membership of the alliance but it would be considered as part of our future climate change action plan. Action: KO to ensure membership of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change is considered as part of the 2025-26 action plan. Action: RS to explore collaboration with other organisations, partnerships, commitments, and campaigns involved in similar work.	KO RS

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11.	BJOT annual report – presented by the Managing Editor of BJOT Sankeetha Nadarajah (SN) joined the meeting. The Board received the BJOT annual report which highlighted improvements in journal submissions, reaching pre-pandemic numbers, and the positive impact of the flexible page budget introduced in 2022, which reduced backlog and waiting times. Additional details included: • BJOT received submissions from 45 countries in 2023, with the UK contributing the most. • The acceptance rate remained steady at 35%, and all issues were published on schedule. • The journal maintained high online views and downloads. • The PubMed application was submitted in early summer 2024, and the Editorial Board met in November 2024 to discuss strategies for boosting submissions and peer-review acceptance. • The Sage contract was renewed for five years, and the journal maintained an Impact Factor of 1.3. BJOT published its updated strategy for 2025-2028, aiming to improve evidence quality, achieve PubMed indexation, and reach an Impact Factor of 2.0. The Board discussed the 35% acceptance rate for submissions, noting that it sounded low and enquired about the nature of revisions and the potential for rejected submissions to be improved. SN acknowledged the peer review process could feel challenging and mentioned efforts to improve reviewer engagement and provide better guidance. It was added that rejections were accompanied with feedback for potential resubmission, highlighting the thorough review process and noting that 35% is a high acceptance rate compared to global standards. SN left the meeting	
12.	Governance review: RCOT Board to note constitutional changes proposed by its sole member BAOT – presented by Head of Governance and Compliance The Board noted that the charity's member, BAOT, was proposing a series of changes to the charity articles. Trustees were reminded that BAOT, as the sole member of RCOT, had a fiduciary duty to act in the interests of RCOT's charitable purposes, ensuring a confluence of interests. It was noted that RCOT's board was not making any decisions, as BAOT could approve changes to the charity's articles subject to Charity Commission consent. The Board reviewed and agreed the following changes were in the interests of the charity: • Changing terms of office to two terms of three years, with the ability to extend a term for up to two years (excluding the international affairs	

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	trustee) – for reasons of ensuring stability and continuity in the governing body. - Reverting the Articles wording to remove reference to Association trustees being ‘elected’ – for reasons of flexibility in relation to the members’ ability to appoint OTs to the Board. - Introduction of a power to remove Board members – for reasons of ensuring the Board has the necessary power to safeguard its effective operation and the charity’s reputation. - Increasing Board quorum – for reasons of improving the robustness of Board decision-making. - Removing President and VP clauses – for reasons of providing flexibility in relation to the creation of honorary roles. The Board reviewed the following changes and agreed they were in the interests of the charity for reasons of ensuring the articles are clear, accessible and up-to-date with current practice: - Clarification of the object and powers clauses - Removing power to refuse to register shares - Amendment of permitted benefits to the member - Simplification of dissolution provisions - Clarification of trustee benefit provisions. The Board noted they would need to submit the proposed articles for Charity Commission consent once BAOT had approved a final version.	
13.	AOB The Board discussed the financial situation and the transition period involving communities and specialist sections. It was agreed that funds would be allocated for activities supporting the development of new practice networks and communities. Consequently, some of those funds would be used to recruit two part-time fixed-term occupational therapists to develop content resources and assist with influencing work related to the workforce strategy. One role would focus on work and health, and the other on independent practice. This initiative was expected to benefit all practice networks and enhance influencing activities by providing more guidance to members.	
	These minutes are agreed by the Board of Trustees as a true record of the meeting. Signature: <u>Odeth Richardson</u> Odeth Richardson (May 7, 2025 08:17 CDT) Minutes signed by: <u>Odeth Richardson</u> (name in capital letters) Date: <u>07/05/25</u>	