

# RCSEd WhatsApp Group Charter



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# RCSEd WhatsApp Group Charter

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The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh recognises that instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp can serve as a practical business tool offering quick, convenient and real-time communication between volunteer groups.

It can offer a practical way to distribute information between group members quickly and efficiently, and for colleagues to communicate easily with each other on matters of College business. This might be especially relevant or convenient when groups of colleagues are travelling together. However, it also introduces risks, including data protection and information security concerns.

This guidance has been produced and approved by the RCSEd Information Governance Group.

**IGG has authorised the use of WhatsApp groups on the following basis:**

1. Participation is not obligatory, and if someone joins, they have the option of leaving at any time. This includes staff.
2. Staff must not be required to join a chat or disclose their personal mobile phone number.
3. At the outset, everyone must consent before being added to a WhatsApp Group as their telephone number will be visible to all within the group, and personal telephone numbers cannot be communicated without consent.
4. Users must not include any sensitive business information in WhatsApp.
5. WhatsApp Groups are not recognised as official governance tools within the College and must not be used for College decision making.
6. Groups are not used to discuss non-work-related issues.
7. Discussions will be moderated by the group admin, and any inappropriate activity may lead to further investigation and potential action under the disciplinary procedure.
8. Those who cease to volunteer for or be employed by the College will be removed from the Groups.
9. As the information is transient in nature, there is a retention period on chats of <30> days
10. The groups are disbanded when they no longer serve a business purpose e.g., after a trip has ended.

## Process

- The person setting up the chat, the group admin, must inform the College's IGG Group, via [dataprotection@rcsed.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@rcsed.ac.uk), that the group exists. This will allow IGG to monitor and allocate a group admin.
- The enclosed WhatsApp charter should be provided to those who agree to join the group.
- The following message should be sent to the Group and be visible as a 'pinned post'.

## WhatsApp Group Charter – The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

Welcome to the [Volunteer Group Name]! This group is here to help us coordinate volunteer efforts, share important updates, and support each other's work. To make sure it works well for everyone, please take a moment to read our group guidelines:


### Group Purpose


#### This group is for:

- Sharing updates about upcoming events, meetings or travel.
- Asking quick questions about logistics.
- Supporting smooth and respectful communication across the team.






By participating in this WhatsApp Group, you agree to these group rules. Participation is not obligatory, and if you join, you have the option of leaving. We would hope that all participants can see the usefulness of the group and will co-operative accordingly.

### Do:






- Keep it relevant – only post messages related to our work.
- Be kind and respectful – treat all members with courtesy.
- Respect everyone's privacy – being part of this group requires mutual trust.
- Use clear, brief messages – especially when confirming or asking something.
- React or acknowledge updates – a  or  helps admins and colleagues know you've seen it. However, it is not necessary to respond to every post.
- If your message is not relevant to the majority of group members, please discuss with the person directly rather than the entire group.

-  Keep your device safe and secure, and ensure apps are regularly updated so they are adequately protected.

 **Please don't:**

-  share jokes, memes, or unrelated forwards
-  make comments about colleagues, management, the Board, work policies
-  message late at night or early morning unless urgent.
-  add people to the group without checking with them first.
-  Debate sensitive or personal topics here – use private conversations or contact the team lead/admin directly.

**You must not:**

-  Share or use anyone's personal data (such as mobile numbers) using WhatsApp or use anyone's contact information to message them individually without their consent.
-  Share information, which is confidential or sensitive, either to the College or to an individual. You have a responsibility to safeguard company and personal data; failure to do so shall be taken very seriously.
-  WhatsApp Groups are not recognised as official governance tools within the College and must not be used for College decision making.
-  Please note that the RCSEd Code of Conduct applies to the use of all communication channels, including WhatsApp. If you are found to be in breach of the Code, you could be subject to disciplinary action under the College Laws.
-  WhatsApp messages can be legally disclosable. For example, WhatsApp messages may be required as part of a Subject Access Request (SAR) under data protection laws, so you must not share personal or corporate information. Deletion or concealment of material relevant to an information request may be a criminal offence.

## Admin Role & Controls

**Our group admins help keep things running smoothly. Their responsibilities include:**

- Managing group settings (e.g., who can post, adding/removing members).
- Amending the chat settings to clear the chat every 30 days.
- Sharing key updates and announcements.
- Addressing concerns or misuse of the group privately.
- Deleting inappropriate messages and reporting such action if needed.

If you have any questions, message an admin directly. We're here to support. Thank you for being part of the team and for everything you do! Let's keep this space supportive.

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