



## Internal review of RCM pay ballots 2022

### Executive summary

During 2022, the RCM was involved in pay negotiations with governments in all four UK nations, as well as the island states of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. Lack of meaningful progress in those discussions led to RCM members in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup> being balloted for industrial action, with a mandate for action achieved in all but England. As is good practice, the RCM has undertaken a review of its activities and has committed to apply any learning to future campaigning.

The RCM Board has received and discussed the review, which has given them assurance that the pay campaign in England (as well as those in the other countries and jurisdictions) was well planned and run. This review demonstrates that a huge amount of work went into trying to get our membership data into the best shape it could be before the ballot started. The RCM Board has concluded that, while this campaign stretched those staff delivering the campaign (namely the trade union and communications teams), given the information in this review, there was nothing further the RCM could have done to affect the outcome of the England ballot.

### Key findings

- While support for industrial action was consistent across England, Wales and Scotland (between 88% and 91%), there was greater variation in turnout (46.7% in England, compared to 55% in Wales and 61% in Scotland).
- The legal threshold for turnout in each of these three nations is 50% of eligible members<sup>2</sup>. In England, in order to pass that threshold, 12,691 members would have had to take part, regardless of how they voted. During the four-and-a-half week ballot period, 11,853 members' votes were received by Civica, the independent expert company responsible for the administration of the ballot, with a further 662 votes received after the ballot closed. Even had these arrived in time, the threshold in England would still not have been met.
- Around 3,000 requests (3,044) were received and fulfilled for additional or replacement ballot papers in England and Wales. This was comparable to those in other trade unions balloting during this period.
- The RCM Board took the decision to hold an aggregated ballot, ie at a national level. Had there been a disaggregated ballot – as conducted by some other unions – strike

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<sup>1</sup> The Northern Ireland ballot took place in 2023 and is not included in this review.

<sup>2</sup> There is no threshold for turnout in Northern Ireland.



action would have been possible in less than 40% of employers in England (53 out of 135), covering only 34% of RCM members.

- Trade union legislation requires strike ballots to be conducted by post, and does not permit the balloting period to be altered once employers have been notified. At the time of notification, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) had suspended its strike action. However, it announced further dates after the RCM ballot was live.
- RCM activists, including 131 pay activists recruited specifically for this campaign, put in huge amounts of work to ensure all members were aware of the ballot, to encourage turnout, to answer questions and ensure those who had not received ballot paper could order replacements.
- There were high levels of member engagement both before and during the ballot period, in person, by phone and email and through the RCM's many social media channels. When the ballot was open, the RCM handled over 500 calls and more than 4,600 emails from members. Investment in a personalised text service allowed RCM to reach just under 20,000 members with a personal message and follow up any queries or concerns.

#### **Actions in response to the review**

- While there is year-round activity to test the robustness of membership data, more will be done to address particular transition points for members. These include the move from student membership to newly-qualified status, changes in employer and contact preferences.
- The functionality of the RCM portal, where members are able to manage and update their own data, is not as user-friendly as it might be. The RCM will review this to encourage greater engagement and better data collection to help members keep their information up to date.
- While there were multiple attempts to engage and communicate with members, including through fortnightly e-news bulletins, open rates (the number of emails that are received but not opened) remain low as a significant number of members have opted out of receiving communication from the RCM. The RCM will look at barriers to engagement, including issues around contact preferences, and how they might be overcome.
- In order to meet member demand during periods of intense activity – as experienced during the ballot periods – internal business processes and staffing levels will be reviewed.

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