

Plant Health Professional Register

Guidelines for Applicants



This document gives you all the necessary information on the Plant Health Professional Register (PHPR) offered by the Royal Society of Biology, including details of how to apply and maintain your registered status.

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Introduction

The Plant Health Professional Register provides independent recognition and validation of your plant health competencies, professional standing and achievements. It is suitable for people working in a wide range of plant health and biosecurity roles, and sectors including government, the horticulture and crop industries, forestry, the natural environment and research.

As a registered Plant Health Professional, you will have access to the RSB's continuing professional development (CPD) scheme and discounted training courses to support your ongoing registration. You will also become part of an expanding cross-sectoral community of plant health and biosecurity professionals, with access to free plant health events and networking opportunities.

About the Plant Health Professional Register

The register was set up in partnership with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and is based on a competency framework that aligns with the current Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain, as well as industry-led standards and assurance schemes. This ensures that the competencies are evidence based and fit for purpose across the breadth of the UK's plant health sectors.

There are three levels within the Register – Associate, Registered and Senior Plant Health Professional – providing a clear pathway for competency development and career progression. Successful applicants may use the post-nominal letters APHP, RPHP or SPHP respective of their level to demonstrate their expertise.



Why become a registered Plant Health Professional?

Becoming a registered Plant Health Professional acknowledges that you and your employer are working to high standards, understand and apply the principles of good biosecurity practice, and comply with the relevant regulations.

Once you are registered you will also have access to the RSB's continuing professional development (CPD) scheme and discounts on RSB's training courses, which can benefit your career progression. By recording CPD on a regular basis, you can:

- Expand your skill set and reflect on your learning.
- Identify gaps or skills that you want to develop.
- Gain support for appraisals, your CV and job applications.
- Demonstrate your commitment to continual learning.
- Provide evidence of your training and development.

As a registered Plant Health Professional, you will:

- Receive recognition of your professional standing and achievements.
- Be eligible to use your post-nominal letters. Associate Plant Health Professionals will be able to use APHP, Registered Plant Health Professionals will be able to use RPHP and Senior Plant Health Professionals can use SPHP.
- Appear on the public Plant Health Register, which will boost your career opportunities by highlighting your experience to employers and the wider community.
- Demonstrate your career progression as you move up through the register levels.
- Receive tailored invitations to free plant health events and talks, joining a network of like-minded professionals to share knowledge, expertise, best practice and up-to-date information. These events all contribute to your CPD. [View past events](#) and see what is coming up.

Is it suitable for me?

The PHPR is a wide-reaching register, with members from a range of government, industry, academic and third-sector backgrounds. These profiles are just a snapshot of the range of backgrounds our registrants have.

In terms of experience, the expectation is that you will have roughly one to two years' experience in a relevant role if you are applying for Associate-level registration, three years' experience for Registered level and five-plus years' experience for Senior level.

If you are unsure about your suitability, read through the competency guidance in [Appendix 1](#) and consider how your experience would help you answer the application questions. It is advisable to discuss your application with a senior colleague or someone in your network who is already on the register.

If you have any further questions, you can also contact the team at registers@rsb.org.uk.



Application requirements and costs

RSB membership

To apply for the Plant Health Professional Register you must first apply to join as a member of the Royal Society of Biology. Once your membership application is accepted and paid for, you can begin the PHP application, even before you are elected as a member. There are a range of membership options depending on your experience: Affiliate, Associate, Member or Fellow. Membership costs vary depending on the grade, full details of which can be found on our [website](#). As a member of the RSB, in addition to the Plant Health Register benefits, you receive:

- A subscription to our award-winning members' magazine, *The Biologist* (BioNet members have e-version access only).
- Access to our continuing professional development scheme, which is key for maintaining professional registration.
- Discounted training courses for varying levels of expertise.
- Informative newsletters to stay up to date with the biosciences.
- Invitations to a range of events.
- Volunteering opportunities at outreach and engagement events.
- Opportunities to apply for exclusive member grants and awards.

There are a range of membership discounts available, including those for staff/members of RSB Member Organisations, PhD students, recent graduates or those on a career break. If you think you may be eligible for discounted membership, please email membership@rsb.org.uk.

Membership applications are open throughout the year, and new members are elected at the start of January, April, July and October. It is recommended that you submit your membership application at least four weeks before the next election to ensure your membership is processed.

Register application

Plant Health Professional Register

Your application will focus on your own role and area of work, and how you use the competencies/apply your knowledge to your own role. The application for the register is taken online through the [mySociety](#) portal. The online application will take you through each step, starting with your personal details, employment details and then onto the competency-based questions. Once you have completed your application and submitted this, there is an application fee to pay.

Applications are open throughout the year and there is no set deadline to submit your application. The RSB elects members to the register at the start of January, April, July and October. It is recommended that you submit your application at least eight weeks before the election date, but please be aware that occasionally assessment can take longer than this, depending on the availability of our volunteer assessors.

If your application is accepted, you will be charged a yearly register renewal fee.

A complete application will include:

- Evidence of educational qualifications or an equivalent.
- Evidence of achieving the required professional competencies.
- Evidence of and a commitment to continuing professional development.
- Adherence to the relevant codes of conduct.
- A reference for your application by someone you know well in a professional capacity, usually a supervisor or line manager.

For a summary of the process please refer to [Appendix 2](#).



Application tips

If you do not have direct experience from your work area for one of the competencies, try to think of situations and examples in which you have encountered it through other means – for example, shadowing a colleague, a training course, volunteering, and even coming across plants and plant health practices in your day-to-day experiences.

- For each competency statement you will need to give clear examples of the role that you played or the contribution that you made to a particular task or activity.
- You may wish to use a STAR approach in providing evidence for some competencies as this may help you to focus on your specific role/knowledge rather than more general knowledge:
 - **Situation:** A brief explanation of the context in which the problem/challenge is defined.
 - **Task:** A description of what you needed to achieve within the given situation, to include the desired outcome.
 - **Action:** A description of what you did and the reasons why.
 - **Result:** A description of the outcomes of your action.
- The table in [Appendix 1](#) goes through a full list of the competencies and what the assessors are looking for in each answer. Make sure you read these in detail before you apply.

The RSB has developed a new online training course to support applicants to the Plant Health Professional Register. This four-module course covers topics from plant health principles and governance, to identifying and controlling pests and pathogens, good biosecurity practices, and raising awareness in the community. The first video introduces the register and is free to everybody, and the remaining modules are free to RSB members at any level.

[View the course on myLearning.](#)

Maintaining your status through an annual CPD submission

Continuing professional development (CPD) is an expanding element of many careers. It offers a mechanism by which you can document your work above and beyond your job role, aiding upwards progression. Our CPD scheme is wide ranging, as we appreciate our members come from all areas of the life sciences and associated industries.

To keep your Plant Health Professional status, you must pass the annual requirements for CPD every year. There is a single system used for all members of the Royal Society of Biology registers, making it simple for people who hold more than one of our professional recognition awards. Our CPD scheme is points based, with 50 points required to complete the year. These are achieved in sums of one to three points per hour depending on the activity.

Almost any activity that develops your valuable skills qualifies for CPD. A small selection includes: training staff, soft skills such as leadership or communication, learning a new practical technique, presenting at an event or self-study in any area of interest.

The Royal Society of Biology helps our registrants meet the targets for annual progression by approving suitable events and courses. We have also produced detailed CPD guidance, which can be [downloaded here](#), and a specific exemplar CPD record for a Plant Health Professional will be available soon.



Appendix 1: Competency guidance

The application for inclusion on the Plant Health Professional Register is based on a competency framework. This draws upon the skills and expertise detailed in the GB Plant Health Strategy. It looks for competency in four clusters and each cluster is broken down into several elements:

- Plant health principles and governance.
- Harmful organisms and risk management.
- Good biosecurity practices.
- Preparedness and communicating impacts on plant health.

Introduction

Your application is about showing an in-depth understanding and knowledge of how your role fits with and supports the [Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain](#).

Applicants working in or with stakeholders in Northern Ireland should additionally demonstrate how their role supports the current biosecurity guidance in Northern Ireland.

You will recognise that plants and trees are essential economic, environmental and social assets that make vital contributions to our food and timber supply and rural economy, and provide important ecosystem services.

You will focus on your contribution to activities that will help to protect agriculture, forestry and the natural environment both nationally and internationally, while recognising the need for and the importance of international trade in plants and plant products.

You will understand that threats to plant biosecurity have increased with the globalisation of trade and travel, and that predicted climate change effects may influence the impact of damaging pests not yet present in the UK and those that are present and have associated management practices.

The level of your involvement and influence will range from local, regional and national to international, and from short term to long term, showing increasing responsibility and competency level from Associate to Registered to Senior Plant Health Professional.

Assessors will be looking for

Assessors will be looking for evidence of the following areas in plant, crop or tree health and biosecurity.

Applicants need to understand:

- What plant biosecurity is, principles of good practice and why it is important.
- The range of plant pests and pathogens that can cause damage and how they may be introduced and/or spread.
- The value of the accurate identification of both hosts and pests, and the approaches used to achieve this.
- Impacts of pests and pathogens on agriculture, forestry and horticulture throughout the entire supply chain and the impact on landscape, amenity and the wider environment.
- Principles of protecting plant health through risk-based decision making and the appropriate use of international phytosanitary legislation.
- Factors that can influence risk such as globalisation of trade and climate change.
- That responsibility for reducing risk sits with those who benefit from the reduction of those risks (where appropriate).
- The diversity of organisations affected by plant health.
- The impact of pests and pathogens on health and safety, particularly in relation to trees – e.g. oak processionary moth or tree/limb falls due to cankers etc.
- Principles, implementation and impact of control strategies and measures.

The level of knowledge and evidence will increase with the competency level from Associate to Registered to Senior Plant Health Professional.

Competency	Assessors will be looking for evidence that you know/do/take an active part in the competencies below:		
	Associate	Registered	Senior
CLUSTER 1 Plant health principles and governance			
		If you are applying to the PHPR for the first time, please evidence Associate and Registered requirements. If you are already an Associate PHP, please only answer the Registered competencies.	If you are applying to the PHPR for the first time, please evidence Associate, Registered and Senior competencies. If you are already a Registered PHP, please only answer the Senior competencies.
1. Plant health principles	Explain the importance of plants and the value of plants to the UK. Give examples of some different pest and disease outbreaks in the past 50 years. How do you describe your job, and your role in protecting plant health, to others?	Give examples describing the impacts of some of the different pest and disease outbreaks in the past 50 years.	Describe some of the factors that threaten plant health.
2. UK Plant Health Service	Describe the organisations that comprise the UK Plant Health Service. Demonstrate an understanding of the specific plant health protection measures implemented across different devolved nations.	Describe the roles of the different organisations in the UK Plant Health Service. Give an example of how you engage with them.	Describe how you initiate the flow of information and decision making within your organisation, and communicate with counterparts in other UK organisations.
3. International plant health regulations and regimes	Explain the international arrangements on how plant health is governed with reference to roles of the IPPC, EPPO and NPPO.	Describe the standards, guidelines and regulations that you use in your role, and how they help protect plant health and biosecurity Demonstrate a working knowledge of: ● Prohibited, controlled and unrestricted classifications.	Explain how plant health legislation with respect to plant passports has changed with the new EU regulations. Describe how you have actively contributed to national and international initiatives to improve working practices. Show an appreciation of the global spread of pests and pathogens, and opportunities for improved biosecurity.

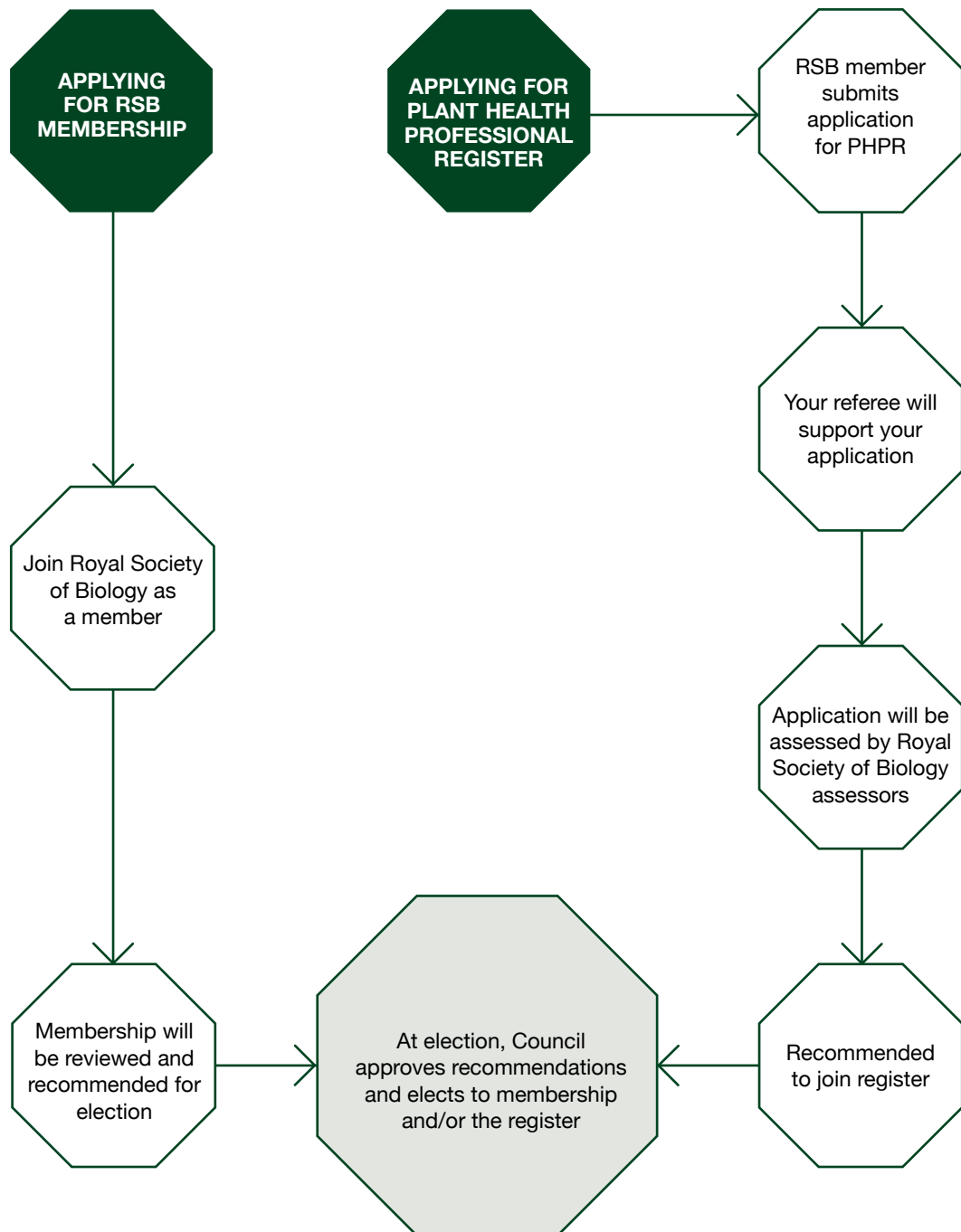
Competency	Assessors will be looking for evidence that you know/do/take an active part in the competencies below:		
	Associate	Registered	Senior
CLUSTER 2 Harmful organisms and risk management			
		If you are applying to the PHPR for the first time, please evidence Associate and Registered requirements. If you are already an Associate PHP, please only answer the Registered competencies.	If you are applying to the PHPR for the first time, please evidence Associate, Registered and Senior competencies. If you are already a Registered PHP, please only answer the Senior competencies.
4. Pests and pathogens	Give named examples of the range of pests (e.g. invertebrates and nematodes) and pathogens (e.g. bacteria, viruses and fungi) that are detrimental to plant health. Select one of these pests or pathogens, and describe the symptoms to help recognise them and common hosts they affect.	Explain why not all organisms are harmful. Demonstrate awareness of new and emerging problems within and threatening the UK. Explain and give examples from the Priority Pests list.	Explain the significance of accurate identification and the consequences of taxonomic revision, giving a named example. Give an example of how emerging technology is helping with surveillance and control strategies.
5. UK Risk Register	Explain the principles of risk assessment. Describe the UK Risk Register and why it is helpful in identifying harmful organisms for control. Explain the difference between unmitigated and mitigated UK Risk Register risk scores. Give an example of a mitigation used to reduce the likelihood of introduction or spread.	Explain why pest risk assessment must be done to international standards. Explain appropriate level of protection (ALOP) and how this is applied in practice. Give examples of how you have used the Risk Register for 'horizon scanning' for new and emerging problems relevant to your business.	Describe how you have informed colleagues of the results of horizon scanning and changes to the Risk Register. Show how you: ● Monitor, manage and review performance in dealing with high-risk pests and pathogens and contribute to strategy for their control. ● Influence policy following identification of new plant health risks. ● Communicate risks appropriately and follow up action where needed.
6. Pathways and controls	Explain the range of different pathways for the introduction and spread of pests and pathogens. Give an example of how a named pest and a named pathogen could be introduced into the UK.	Explain how pests and pathogens spread naturally such as via air, water, soil and vectors. Explain the difference between introduction and spread.	Explain how an organism becomes 'established'. Give an example of how different pest and pathogen life cycles and survival strategies influence pest-management strategies.

Competency	Assessors will be looking for evidence that you know/do/take an active part in the competencies below:		
	Associate	Registered	Senior
CLUSTER 3 Good biosecurity practices			
		If you are applying to the PHPR for the first time, please evidence Associate and Registered requirements. If you are already an Associate PHP, please only answer the Registered competencies.	If you are applying to the PHPR for the first time, please evidence Associate, Registered and Senior competencies. If you are already a Registered PHP, please only answer the Senior competencies.
7. Good biosecurity principles	Define 'biosecurity'. Explain the concept of the biosecurity continuum and pre-border, border and post-border activities.	Explain the terms 'harmful organisms', 'introduction' and 'spread'. Give examples of your work across the biosecurity continuum.	Give examples of how the biosecurity continuum can be applied at international and local level.
8. Demonstrate knowledge of good biosecurity standards and practices within your work area	Give examples of how you use one of the biosecurity standards or industry good practice guides (e.g. Plant Health Management Standard, Keep it Clean, RHS biosecurity guidance) to prevent the introduction and spread of plant pests and pathogens within your work area.	Give an example of how you have implemented good biosecurity practices to comply with a standard or best practice guideline. Give an example of how you use and improve biosecurity protocols to deal with pest and disease management within your organisation.	Describe how you have improved and developed biosecurity protocols to deal with pest and disease management. Demonstrate an awareness and adoption of international standards (e.g. ISPM) or protocols (e.g. EPPO).
9. Plant health controls to reduce risk	Explain the different controls on movement of plants and plant material to prevent the introduction and spread of harmful organisms. Explain what a phytosanitary certificate and a plant passport are, and when you would use them. Give a named example of how plant health controls are used to reduce the risk of spread or introduction of a harmful organism.	Describe the range of assurance schemes (e.g. PHPS, Plant Healthy, UK & Ireland Sourced and Grown, OHAS, Safe Haven) to ensure high-quality planting material.	Describe the main measures within plant health legislation to reduce risk – i.e. protect against introduction and spread (e.g. phytosanitary certificates, plant passports, scientific authorisation).

Competency	Assessors will be looking for evidence that you know/do/take an active part in the competencies below:		
	Associate	Registered	Senior
CLUSTER 4 Preparedness and communicating impacts on plant health			
		If you are applying to the PHPR for the first time, please evidence Associate and Registered requirements. If you are already an Associate PHP, please only answer the Registered competencies.	If you are applying to the PHPR for the first time, please evidence Associate, Registered and Senior competencies. If you are already a Registered PHP, please only answer the Senior competencies.
10. Contingency planning and outbreak management	Describe what a contingency plan is and why it is needed. Give an example of a contingency plan that is relevant to your work and how you have used it.	Describe the steps you take to prepare in the case of an outbreak.	Describe how you have implemented a contingency plan across your work area and identified changes for the future.
11. Communicating the impact and consequences of control strategies and measures on: a) economic losses b) social impacts c) environmental impacts d) health and safety	Explain a simple plant supply chain and the industries and stakeholders involved. Using a named example, describe how the introduction of a pest or a pathogen may impact upon economic, social, environmental and/or health and safety issues.	Show your understanding of the range and diverse nature of sectors that could be affected by biosecurity – e.g. trade and natural environments. Explain the impact and consequences of an outbreak and management practices at a regional level using a named example.	Explain the impact and consequences of an outbreak and management practices at a national and international level.
12. Raising awareness about the importance of healthy plants	Explain who can help protect plant health and give examples of actions they can take. Give examples of public and stakeholder awareness campaigns and how you have used them to communicate to others.	Demonstrate how you explain the principles of plant biosecurity to a wider audience. Explain how you make use of existing networks of communication and/or develop new ones.	Show how you lead, negotiate and support regional, national and international plant health policy and campaigns to enhance plant biosecurity.



Appendix 2: Application stages



Appendix 3: FAQs

1. Are there deadlines throughout the year for the register or membership applications?

There are no set deadlines and applications are open throughout the year. The RSB elects members and registrants at the start of each quarter: January, April, July and October.

2. I am not sure about my RSB membership grade. Who should I contact?

You can take our '[Which grade is for me?](#)' online quiz. If you still have questions, please send a copy of your CV to membership@rsb.org.uk who will be able to advise you.

3. How long will it take me to complete the application?

This varies from person to person. We advise that you prepare your competency answers offline first, and then when you are ready to apply you can simply copy and paste everything into the online application.

4. How much should I write for each competency answer? Is there a word count?

For most of the competencies you are advised to provide one to three paragraphs of text – this varies depending on whether you are applying for Associate, Registered or Senior level.

5. How long will it take for my application to be reviewed?

Usually applications are reviewed in four to six weeks. If the RSB is receiving a high volume of applications at once, this can be longer.

6. I submitted my application a long time ago and have not heard anything. What should I do?

First, check whether your referees have responded to the reference request. This commonly causes delays in application processing as, without a reference, your application can't go to reviewers. If your referee has not received the email, ask them to check their junk or spam folders or get in contact with the RSB team at registers@rsb.org.uk.

7. Who assesses my application?

Applications are assessed by the register panel of assessors. Each assessor will be a member of the register themselves and will hold registration at the level that you are applying to, or higher. You will not be assessed by an assessor who works at the same organisation as you or who has identified that they know you personally. All applications are kept anonymous and personal details are removed prior to sending applications to assessors.

8. I have received feedback requiring more information to be provided. Is there a deadline to submit this further information?

There is no set deadline to submit. However, you should aim to do this within one to two months so that the remainder of your application is still up to date. If you do not resubmit in six months, then you may be asked to update the rest of your application as well.

9. If my application is not accepted to the register, what happens next?

If your application requires minor revision, you will be provided with feedback by email, and information about how to resubmit your application for a second review.

If the assessors feel that you need to gain significantly more experience, your application may be rejected initially, and you will be informed of how to address gaps in your skills and competences, and the time frame to reapply. For example, you may need to gain some further professional experience, or seek experience or training in a particular competency area.

10. I am already on the register. How can I achieve 50 continuing professional development (CPD) points per year?

The CPD scheme is broad and there are many different activities that can count as CPD. A list of CPD-approved events and courses is on the [Plant Health Register webpage](#) and register members are frequently invited to relevant events, all of which can contribute to your CPD. Other internal training, conferences or updating your knowledge will also count towards the CPD scheme. Most activities you record are worth two CPD points per hour, so 50 points is roughly the equivalent of 25 hours. Full CPD guidance can be found on our [website](#).

11. I am taking a work interruption this year and won't be able to make 50 CPD points. Will I be removed from the register?

If you have a specific reason why you will be unable to make 50 CPD points in a year, please contact the register team at registers@rsb.org.uk as soon as possible and explain your situation. Usually the team can allow a CPD exemption for one year, or longer if required.

12. I would like to hear more about RSB events and training. How can I get more information?

A selection of upcoming events are showcased in our members' newsletter, which is sent at the start of each month. For more on training please email training@rsb.org.uk, who will subscribe you to the monthly training newsletter.

13. How can I get in touch with the team about my registration or CPD?

Please email registers@rsb.org.uk.





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