A guide for Honorary Secretaries of divisions
A GUIDE FOR HONORARY SECRETARIES OF DIVISIONS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 There are 199 divisions each of which is a territorial unit of the Association. Division boundaries are determined by Council (amendments being published in the British Medical Journal).

1.2 The membership of a division includes those members and medical student members of the Association who are resident within its area, and those who have elected for reasons of convenience to belong to a particular division.

1.3 Each BMA division has a regional centre or national office which provides assistance for a number of divisions.

2 OFFICE OF HONORARY SECRETARY

2.1 The success and activity of the Association at division level depends primarily upon the honorary secretary, who is the essential link between the Council and individual members. Advice and help from the regional centre/national office is readily available. The honorary secretary should make a special point of maintaining close contact with the regional centre/national office and keeping them informed of local activities. The appointment of an assistant honorary secretary/secretary designate of the division can be helpful. In this way the senior secretary is relieved of some of the routine duties of his/her office and the assistant secretary acquires a knowledge of the work involved before taking over the more responsible post. A division which is active socially should also appoint a social secretary. The role of liaison with the press and the local MP is best accomplished by a keen honorary public affairs secretary (press secretary), who can contact the BMA’s Public Affairs Division, sgodfrey@bma.org.uk / 020 7383 6123 or the public affairs office in the relevant devolved nation¹, for advice and information.

2.2 The honorary secretary will find it helpful to keep informed of general Association business and policy. Current events are reported on the BMA’s website, www.bma.org.uk and in BMA News. Matters of particular relevance to the functioning of the division and often requiring action are dealt with in “D” circulars headed “BMA Divisions” issued by the Council Secretariat.

2.3 Once a year, all honorary secretaries are invited to BMA House for a general conference.

2.4 The honorary secretary is responsible for Association property in the hands of the division such as minute books, bank passbook, cash book, and files of documents, letters, and annual reports. He/she should see that the organisation rules are kept up to date, and should be familiar with them in order that the division may function efficiently.

2.5 As well as dealing with enquiries from members, the Association’s regional centres/national offices provide assistance to honorary secretaries, including the advice and support with division notices and papers for meetings etc which will be circulated electronically from the divisions web page by the honorary secretary. The level and type of support provided, and what the division is required to do, will be based on an agreed service specification between the division and regional centre/national office.

2.6 Industrial Relations Officers/Assistant Secretaries and Employment Advisers, in addition to providing individual help to members, also provide advice and assistance in the development of the trade union activities of the BMA at a local level, particularly with regard to the establishment of and support for local negotiating committees within NHS organisations.

3 FUNCTIONS OF THE DIVISION

¹ Scotland Public Affairs Office: Tel. 0131 247 3050 Fax. 0131 247 3001 Email. Press.scotland@bma.org.uk Web: www.bma.org.uk/Scotland
Wales Senior Public Affairs Officer (press and assembly): Tel. 029 2047 4611 Fax. 029 2047 4629 Email: jjenkins@bma.org.uk Web: www.bma.org.uk/wales
Northern Ireland: Public Affairs Officer: Tel. 028 9026 9672 Assembly and Research Officer: Tel 028 9026 9673 Fax. 028 9026 9674 Email: smccracken@bma.org.uk, gmagee@bma.org.uk Web: www.bma.org.uk/northernireland
3.1 The division plays an important role in communication between the individual member and headquarters and its functions are fourfold:

(a) **Medico-political**

(i) To represent the BMA and individual members in dealings with the local health bodies and other organisations. To ensure that the BMA is formally consulted on all relevant matters.

(ii) To represent the medical profession as a whole in local negotiations (eg a proposal to close a local hospital, or to close an accident and emergency department or over any matter affecting the terms and conditions of service of the profession).

(iii) To negotiate for the local medical profession with local authorities such as the police (re: car parking), the water authority (re: water rationing), etc.

(iv) To be the local mouthpiece of the medical profession as a whole in relation to the local press and broadcasting stations. (Each division should have a press secretary, who can contact the Public Affairs Division at BMA House for advice and information).

(v) To be the local channel of communication with the Members of Parliament, MSPs/AMs/MLAs and local political organisations and to see that they are fully and correctly briefed on matters affecting the medical profession.

(vi) To liaise with local craft committees and to keep in touch with their representatives.

(vii) To nominate informed individuals to address any interested local body when the BMA is invited to supply a speaker.

(viii) To nominate a representative or representatives to serve on the regional council (in England – please see 5.5 of Regional Council rules).

(b) **Scientific, educational and clinical**

(i) To organise local scientific and clinical meetings, preferably of a kind not covered by any postgraduate medical centre, to the extent to which the division’s resources permit. It is very often helpful to combine the scientific and the social function.

(ii) To effect liaison with kindred professions locally.

(iii) To provide career advice, where this is sought, and to advise on all aspects of professional life to any interested party-schools, colleges, technical colleges, etc).

(c) **Social**

To arrange social events for BMA members and their partners.

(d) **Local administration**

(i) To appoint representatives to the Representative Body and to study and comment on issues upon which the Association has (or is expected to have) a policy.

(ii) To nominate BMA representatives to serve on local joint staff consultative committees and other local bodies or to make nominations to headquarters.

(iii) To act as a sounding board for headquarters and to convey local reactions on any topic to headquarters.

(iv) To assist in recruitment drives among non-members and medical students.

(v) To organise charitable/benevolent work on a local basis.
3.2 The success of a division must ultimately depend upon the loyal co-operation and support of all its members, no matter in which branch of the profession they may be engaged. A regular newsletter or email to members outlining the activities of the division and summarising information received from headquarters should increase this co-operation and support.

4 DIVISION RULES

4.1 The division is governed by the Memorandum and Articles of the Association, the current version of which is to be found on the BMA website at: http://www.bma.org.uk/about_bma/ArticlesBMA.jsp Subject to these, each division is free to govern itself in such manner as it thinks fit. However, to facilitate efficient organisation and administration of the division, model rules are available from the secretariat of the BMA Council at: ldijeh@bma.org.uk / 020 7383 6260. Before adoption or amendment, a copy of any new or altered rules should be sent to the Council Secretariat in order that the approval of the Organisation Committee may be obtained. The rules do not become operative unless and until they have been so approved and subsequently adopted by the division.

4.2 Subject to the above, the division appoints its own officers and Executive Committee and manages its own affairs.

5 DIVISION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Model Rules for a division suggest a constitution for an Executive Committee. This provides a desirable balance of age and professional grouping, although it is accepted that every division is free to decide on the constitution of its Executive Committee in the light of local circumstances. If the division is a scattered one, members of the Executive Committee may be chosen from the various districts and its members made responsible as far as possible for looking after their own districts.

6 DIVISION MEETINGS

6.1 Division meetings may be of a business, scientific or social nature or a blend of any of these. A minimum period of notice of general meetings which must be given to all members of the division is laid down in the division Rules. The Rules also specify the business which may be considered at “ordinary”, “annual” and “special” meetings respectively.

6.2 A division should meet regularly and reasonably frequently. The Rules provide that an Annual Meeting must be held. The principle of a fixed day for meetings is valuable, eg the first Tuesday in every month. There are advantages in arranging in advance a programme of meetings for the ensuing session or calendar year and in issuing it to members.

(a) Social functions

6.3 Social functions help to make and maintain a “live” division, particularly those occasions to which partners or friends can be invited. These may include a formal dinner or less formal buffet supper; a talk on a topic not exclusively medical; or a visit to a place of interest in the locality.

(b) Venues

6.4 Postgraduate medical centres provide a focal point for doctors in the area and divisions will often find it convenient to arrange for their meetings and lectures to be held at these centres. You are also advised to enquire as to whether these centres or other NHS accommodation may be hired free of charge for trade union activities.

(c) Speakers

6.5 Divisions have a free hand so far as the discussions they initiate and the persons they ask to take part are concerned. Many divisions invite non-medical speakers as they often enliven the discussion. Speakers in their particular fields may be obtained through other professional bodies, particularly the local branches of the dental, legal and veterinary professions.

6.6 Speakers’ hotel expenses and the reimbursement of travelling expenses (in accordance with the rules for elected members) may be charged to official funds. If the lecture is on a scientific subject, a moderate fee may be offered to the speaker and may be claimed from the Association. There is, however, no provision
for honorarium or fees to speakers on non-scientific subjects and any such payment should always be made from voluntary funds (see section 7 (c)).

(d) **Attendance by non-members**

6.7 Advice is sometimes sought about when to open a division meeting to doctors who, either from apathy or because they are opposed to its policies, do not belong to the Association. The problem arises most often at times of crisis, when it is felt desirable to obtain the widest cross-section of opinion. An open meeting of this kind is accepted custom, and may be convened by a division alone, or jointly with local branch of practice committees. The most important point to remember, if it is desired to form a BMA opinion, eg to frame a resolution for sending to Council or to the Representative Body, is that such a resolution can be voted on by members only.

7 **DIVISION FINANCE**

(a) **Ordinary grants**

7.1 Divisions are financed by means of annual grants. The grants are calculated from an estimate of requirements and the balance held, as shown in the annual financial reports. Grants to divisions are not treated as a matter of routine but are determined in the light of the activity and requirements of the division. If divisions are to be adequately financed, it is extremely important that the cost of future activities should be accurately estimated.

7.2 Before it is decided to incur any special or extraordinary expenditure, and in order to avoid personal liability, a detailed application seeking advice or further financial help should be made to head office.

7.3 Honorary secretaries of divisions are required to furnish annually a report of their activities, together with a financial statement on a form provided by headquarters. The period covered by the report is from January to December and the reports should be submitted by 31 January if possible and no later than 22 March in each year.

7.4 Headquarters is always ready to give advice if there is any difficulty in completing the annual financial statement.

(b) **Supplementary grants**

7.5 The amount of the annual grant should be adequate for requirements in the light of the information supplied. However, divisions should not be hampered in their work by lack of funds and, if necessary, special supplementary grants can be made. Applications for supplementary grants will always be considered with the minimum of delay.

(c) **Voluntary fund**

7.6 Most divisions maintain a voluntary fund to cover expenditure which cannot be met from the ordinary division funds. This can prove very useful as such a fund obviates the need for special collections for particular purposes. Divisions vary in the way in which they establish the fund. Income relating to the voluntary fund must not be included in the annual financial report.

(e) **Unauthorised expenditure**

7.7 Expenditure from Association funds such as the following would be contrary to the practice of the Association:

(i) Honoraria or fees to speakers on non-scientific subjects invited by the division to address its members. (Travel and hospitality are however legitimate charges)

(ii) Grants to benevolent funds

(iii) Grants to other funds created for objects to which the funds of the Association cannot lawfully be applied

(iv) Donations or subscriptions to other local or national organisations
(v) Wreaths or other tributes

(vi) Purchase of division regalia or additions thereto

7.8 Division funds may be used for the provision of up to three meals per year for general meetings of the division (ie excluding social meetings) up to a maximum of £15.00 per head for each meal. It is hoped that this will increase attendance at division meetings and obviate the need to seek external sponsorship. Where meals are not provided at general meetings division funds may be used for the provision of light refreshments (tea, coffee, biscuits). The honorary secretary is expected to use discretion, bearing in mind the distance members have to travel and the extent to which alternative catering facilities are available. Prior approval for expenditure on meals and light refreshments for general meetings is not necessary, but the total cost over the year of each must be included in the annual financial statement. If refreshment costs appear unduly heavy, these will need to be justified to the Organisation Committee, which is responsible for advising Council about the allocation of grants. You are also advised to enquire as to whether postgraduate centres or other NHS accommodation may be hired free of charge for trade union activities.

(f) Bank account

7.9 Each division should hold a bank account and this should be in the name of the division itself and not in the name of any individual or individuals. The illness or death of the person in whose name the account stands might result in the funds of the Association passing into the hands of executors or other persons, if this rule is disregarded.

7.10 It is essential that the division’s Voluntary Fund should be kept separate from the “official” account in the bank. If this is not done confusion in book-keeping can easily arise.

8 THE DIVISION AND ASSOCIATION BUSINESS

8.1 The Representative Body is the “Parliament” of the Association. Once a year it meets to review the activities of the Council and committees. The meeting takes place after branch of practice conferences. It is the responsibility of the division Executive to provide an opportunity for discussion of the agenda for the meeting, and to make all members of the division feel that their co-operation is needed, in order that the division’s representative may attend the Annual Representative Meeting adequately briefed on the view of the division.

8.2 The division takes part in formulating Association policy in a variety of ways: by proposing motions for inclusion in the agendas of Representative Meetings or craft conferences; by supporting, opposing or amending motions brought forward by other divisions; and by bringing to the notice of the Council, in the intervals between Representative Meetings, matters deemed to be important or urgent.

8.3 Unless binding instructions have been given by the division, a representative is expected to exercise discretion in deciding how to vote and speak, guided where possible by the known sentiments of the division which elected him/her. Divisions are encouraged to give their representative(s) the opportunity to report back, though this may be done by newsletter or email rather than at a meeting. A report of some kind should always be made. If a representative has found it necessary to speak or vote contrary to the prior wish or feeling of his/her division, the representative should seek and be accorded an occasion to give an account of this. In reporting back, it should be remembered that a record of the main decisions of the Meeting and an account of the more important debates appears on the BMA’s website, BMA News and in the British Medical Journal. It is not necessary for a Representative to report in great length and detail, though it is helpful to have a report on any motion put forward by the division or on which the division had previously expressed a view.

8.4 It is the duty of the division to deal without delay with matters referred from headquarters either in a division meeting or through the Executive Committee or its officers. Honorary secretaries are strongly advised to spread interest and initiative over as wide a circle as possible and should seek the assistance of the regional centre wherever they think local affairs would be facilitated by such help.
9 THE DIVISION AND RECRUITMENT

9.1 Recruitment is one of the most important functions of a division. The BMA’s Membership Development Group is responsible for recruitment and retention activities. In any membership year there will be a mix of national and local recruitment initiatives. Peer recruitment has, historically, been an important contribution to healthy membership levels and if a formal divisional recruitment exercise is considered the regional centre should be consulted.

9.2 Recruitment begins with medical students, before the doctor even qualifies. Membership of the BMA is open to any medical student studying at a UK medical school. There is a National BMA Medical Students Committee (MSC) and an MSC in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Every effort should be made to encourage medical student members and new full members to participate locally in the activities of the BMA. Regional centres run a core programme of events at medical schools to promote the Association and encourage membership.

9.3 Members of the division Executive should take every opportunity of making new members feel that the BMA is a responsible organisation capable of protecting professional interests and assisting in solving individual problems. Divisions should try to involve new members at an early stage in the activities of the Association.

10 THE DIVISION AND THE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

The BMA - through its Parliamentary Unit and National Office public affairs offices - is in close contact with Ministers, Members of both UK Houses of Parliament and the devolved parliaments and assemblies, and government departments. This puts the BMA in a unique position to advise at a high level on all aspects of legislation. Parliamentary proceedings, including the progress of relevant bills, are monitored very closely. Often, requests are made to Members of Parliament and Peers to table questions, make points during debates and support or amend clauses in Bills. The Parliamentary Unit/National Office public affairs office gives guidance to head office secretariat and divisions on the most appropriate way of putting each particular case. Divisions should make contact with their MPs/MSPs/AMs/MLAs on items of importance to the profession, both on local and national issues. The Parliamentary Unit, Robert Okunnu / 020 7383 6520, should be contacted for advice on contacts with Westminster MPs. Parliamentary liaison locally is normally undertaken by the division’s press secretary for whom there is a separate guide.

11 THE DIVISION AND MEDICAL CHARITIES

Experience has shown that the organisation and support of medical charities depends almost entirely on the vigour and enthusiasm of local units of the Association. Therefore it is suggested that each division appoints a Charities Secretary to assume responsibility for local organisation and to stimulate local interest. After paying expenses, considerable sums can be made available for medical charities from social events. The BMA Charitable Trust receives gifts and donations and applies them where most needed to the various charities of the medical profession, not only those administered by the BMA. Further information is available from the Secretary, Charities Committee, at headquarters, mflint@bma.org.uk / 020 7383 6142.

12 USEFUL READING

BMA website www.bma.org.uk
The Memorandum and Articles of the Association
Medical Ethics Today – The BMA’s handbook of ethics and law
The LNC handbook
Notes for Guidance of Honorary Secretaries in Completing Division Reports
The Model Rules of the Division