Conference of England LMCs

A Beginner’s Guide

This is intended as a guide to the Conference of England LMCs and its many mysterious rituals and systems – a reminder for the old hands who know it all anyway and a beginner’s guide for the new attendees
The Purpose of Conference

For your colleagues left at the practice working their fingers to the bone, the Conference of England LMCs is simply a wizard wheeze to get out of a days’ surgery.

For you, attending the Conference of England LMCs is a serious business allowing the exchange of ideas with colleagues from other parts of the country, an opportunity for networking and, most importantly, the mechanism to set GPC England policy. Indeed, it is the mechanism whereby LMCs representing grassroots GPs aim to set the direction for GPC England for the coming year. It is the opportunity to register protest at the government, at the health departments and even, perhaps, at GPC England.

The BMA is essentially our trade union, and Conference is the mechanism for us, the grass roots GPs, to tell the union what is important to us. It is also the opportunity to celebrate the successes of negotiations and to, perhaps, express our displeasure with the failures.

Standing Orders

The conference Standing Orders are the legalistic words that determine who can attend, how business is conducted, who can speak and when. It has been written to facilitate the business of the Conference. Like all official documents of this kind it is written in specific legalistic way which can make it difficult to understand. If there is anything you do not understand in the document, ask an Agenda Committee member and they will do their best to explain it to you.

(Although I can’t promise that their explanation will be any more understandable).

Agenda Committee (AC)

1. The highly professional elected members of Conference who order and collate the motions received into the document that becomes the agenda for the Conference.
2. The dreadful swine who destroyed my carefully crafted motion, cut it into bits and inserted it unceremoniously into some strange composite motion that I do not understand, or worse still, buried it in a bracket or consigned it to the dustbin of Part 2.
3. The unspeakable pedants who reject my motion just because a missing comma in some way makes it ambiguous or incompetent.

- delete which does not apply

Agenda Committee Pit

That box near the stage that the AC inhabit for the duration of Conference. The pit is where you can meet any AC member, where you hand in completed speaker slips, where you can enquire about any motion, standing order interpretation or seek any guidance.

Agenda

Far more motions are received from LMCs than can ever be debated.

The agenda is laid out in two parts:

- Part 1 being those motions prioritised for debate, and
- Part 2, those that the AC felt would not be reached, would not make impact or could not change policy, or were a restatement of already accepted policy ‘A’ motions or ‘AR’ motions

| Standing Order 24. ‘A’ motions: Motions which the agenda committee consider to be a reaffirmation of existing conference policy, or which are regarded by the chair of the GPC England as being non-controversial, self-evident or already under action or consideration, shall be prefixed with a letter ‘A’. |
| Standing Order 25. ‘AR’ motions: Motions which the chair of the GPC England is prepared to accept without debate as a reference to the GPC England shall be prefixed with the letters ‘AR’. |
Definition: When a motion is accepted as a reference it means simply that the GPC will consider the sentiment rather than the detailed wording of the motion when formulating policy. This may be where we all wholeheartedly agree with the underlying sentiment, but the exact words may have adverse unintended consequences.

When a motion is accepted as written, it is the exact wording that is deemed GPC/BMA policy – hence the somewhat excessive pedantry of the AC when scrutinising wording of motions.

Part 2 of the agenda also has motions that, whilst the sentiment is good, the motions were in some way incompetent or were thought unlikely to be reached once more pressing matters were debated.

All motions chosen for debate are then collated into topics, and then those motions that are expressing the same views or sentiments are grouped together under one motion that is chosen as a lead motion – this is often either a composite motion pulling different ones together, or if there is a pithy, accurate, competent motion from an LMC that covers the topic, then that is chosen. This lead motion is highlighted in bold and all other motions that are related to that motion are placed into a bracket underneath.

If the bold motion is an AC composite, the motion will state which LMC will open the debate and that LMCs motion will appear next in the bracket.

Request: If you are opening a debate you will be speaking to the bold motion not just your own LMC motion – please be prepared to speak to all parts of the bold motion. It is not good practice to either ignore part of the lead motion or to actively disagree with it.

Supplementary Agenda

This lists any changes since time of printing the agenda, eg new business and chosen motions and any typos etc that have come to the notice of the AC after the printing of the motion. (Of course, with such a highly professional crew, this is rare!)

‘New Business’ is as it says – anything that was not known before the closing date for motions. For example, if the week before conference, the government announced that all GPs had to go to work every Monday dressed as Darth Vader, then we could consider any Star Wars related motion as new business and then decide whether it should be debated.

‘Chosen motions’. This is the mechanism that allows LMCs to drag their favourite motion out of Part 2 and into Part 1.

Standing Order 26 - ‘C’ motions: Prior to the conference, a ballot of representatives shall be conducted to enable them to choose motions, (‘C’ motions), amendments or riders for debate. Using only the prescribed form, which must be signed and received by the GPC England secretariat by the time notified for the receipt of items for the supplementary agenda, each representative may choose up to three motions, amendments or riders to be given priority in debate. Chosen motions must receive the vote of at least ten representatives. The first three motions, amendments or riders chosen, plus any others receiving the vote of at least twenty representatives, shall be given priority.

Speaking

Having travelled all the way to London you will of course be keen to speak. That process starts with the Speakers Slip – fill it in correctly and the AC will be your friends for life, miss out relevant detail and we will do our best to find you in the hall to correct it (this is why we ask you to put your seat number and telephone number on your slip).

See example of speaker slip below.

It’s not rocket science; it’s not even as complicated as a QOF or enhanced service report.
Annual Conference of England LMCs
Speaker Slip
(see notes on completion overleaf)

**MOTION NUMBER:**

**Section heading:**

Request to speak in session (tick box)

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<th>Friday am ☐</th>
<th>Friday pm ☐</th>
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**Name:**

**LMC/Constituency:**

**Email address/ mobile tel no:**

**Seat No:**

**SPEAKING**
(tick one only or indicate parts below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proposer ☐</th>
<th>For ☐</th>
<th>Against ☐</th>
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**Does your LMC or constituency have a motion in the bracket?**

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<th>Yes ☐</th>
<th>No ☐</th>
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**Are you a first time speaker?**

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<th>Yes ☐</th>
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**I represent**

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<th>LMC ☐</th>
<th>GPC ☐</th>
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**Special Expertise/ Information/ Declaration of interest:**

Please complete **ALL** boxes in **BLOCK CAPITALS** and hand in at the Agenda Committee desk as soon as possible (& before the session starts)

- For Motion Number, write the number of the motion you want to speak to.
- Constituency – which LMC do you represent – it allows the AC to create a balance of speakers from different parts of the country and it helps us to find you if there is a question or clarification needed.
- Seat number – again helps the AC to find you but less critical if you are prepared to look at the screen where the AC will post messages.
- If you are for or against the motion please note appropriately – it again helps to ensure a balanced debate.
- If you have specialist knowledge please note in next box – eg if the debate is about the influence of Time Lord regeneration on work load, and you are from Gallifrey, then that would be relevant.
- If you are a first-time speaker then let the AC know on the speaker slip as the Chair of Conference will try to give precedence to first time speakers over the old hands.
- Please write all details legibly – it really helps.
Your slip is accepted, you are called to speak – what next?

**If you are proposing the motion, then you have 3 minutes** to propose but please remember less is more, keep it short and pithy if possible as long rambling speeches both switch off the audience and will be truncated at the end of the three minutes. Lights will guide you - a yellow light when you have one minute to go and a red light to stop.

**All other speakers are limited to 2 minutes.** If, however, time is short and business is in danger of being missed, then the Chairman may decide to truncate all debates to fit more topics into the time available.

| Standing Order 58. | A member of the conference, including the chair of the GPC England, moving a motion, shall be allowed to speak for three minutes; no other speech shall exceed two minutes. However, the chair may extend these limits. |
| Standing Order 59. | The conference may, at any period, reduce the time to be allowed to speakers, whether in moving resolutions or otherwise, and that such a reduction shall be effective if it is agreed by the chair. |

Sometimes you submit slip after slip and never seem to be called. So just how do you get your voice heard? For the adventurous among you, please note a bizarre costume or other eye catching tricks do not work. There are some pointers in a separate handout - "How to be Heard", but here are a few tips:

- Pick the afternoon.
- Ask the AC about lists of contentious motions and those with large numbers of speakers and possibly avoid these. Instead try and speak to motions to which very few are wishing to speak.
- As mentioned above, let us know on the speaker slip if you have specialist knowledge or are a first-time speaker.

**Alterations to Motions - Amendments and Riders**

Sometimes motions are just not clear enough, so there is a desire to add words to clarify or there is wish to amend the motion to better reflect the original sense of the motion.

How this is done, and the rules of debate, are set out in the Standing Orders. Basically, requests for amendments and riders must be in writing and must be approved by the LMC originally proposing the motion. The final decision as to whether these can be debated rests with the Chair – speak to the AC, they will keep you on the right track.

This procedure may seem to be a bit of a pest but is to avoid mayhem and anarchy.

| Standing Order 29. | An amendment shall – leave out words; leave out words and insert or add others (provided that a substantial part of the motion remains and the original intention of the motion is not enlarged or substantially altered); insert words; or be in such form as the chair approves. |
| Standing Order 30. | A rider shall – add words as an extra to a seemingly complete statement, provided that the rider is relevant and appropriate to the motion on which it is moved. |
| Standing Order 31. | No amendment or rider which has not been included in the printed agenda shall be considered unless a written copy of it has been handed to the agenda committee. The names of the proposer and seconder of the amendment or rider, and their constituencies, shall be included on the written notice. Notice must be given before the end of the session preceding that in which the motion is due to be moved, except at the chair’s discretion. For the first session, amendments or riders must be handed in before the session begins. |
| Standing Order 32. | No seconder shall be required for any motion, amendment or rider submitted to the conference by the GPC England, a local medical committee, or the joint agenda committee, or for any composite motion or amendment produced by the agenda committee under standing order 21. All other motions, amendments or riders, after being proposed, must be seconded. |
| Standing Order 33. | No amendments or riders will be permitted to motions debated under standing order 27. |
Rules of Debate

This is just mind bogglingly complex when you read the Standing Orders – Standing Order 34 – 50 - but there are a few simple guidelines:

Speakers represent the LMC or the GPC (E) when speaking – if there is a conflict of interest then tell conference.

**Standing Order 34** - Members of the conference have an overriding duty to those they represent. If a speaker has a pecuniary or personal interest, beyond his capacity as a member of the conference, in any question which the conference is to debate, this interest shall be declared at the start of any contribution to the debate.

When speaking, stand up, when not speaking sit down, and listen.

**Standing Order 35** - Every member of the conference shall be seated except the one addressing the conference.

If you ramble, repeat yourself or if you simply restate what another speaker has said then the Chair will politely ask you to refrain.

**Standing Order 41** - The chair shall take any necessary steps to prevent tedious repetition.

Riders and Amendments

Riders and amendments are dealt with on a first come, first served basis, i.e. if there are two amendments they are dealt with in order. If there is an amendment to a motion, this is debated before the motion. If there is a rider, then the motion is debated first and the rider considered after the original motion voted on and carried.

**Standing Order 42** - Whenever an amendment or a rider to an original motion has been moved and seconded, no subsequent amendment or rider shall be moved until the first amendment or rider has been disposed of.

**Standing Order 43** - Amendments shall be debated and voted upon before returning to the original motion.

**Standing Order 44** - Riders shall be debated and voted upon after the original motion has been carried.

Chair of Committee

Following the debate, the Chair/Lead of the relevant GPC sub-committee or Policy Group has the opportunity to speak. He or she will use this time to set out relevant information and may ask for the motion to be taken as a ‘reference’ rather than as a straight vote.

Taken as a Reference

When a request is made to take the motion as a reference – see above – usually by the Chair/Lead of sub-committee/Policy Group, but sometimes from the representatives themselves, it remains the decision of the original proposer of the motion. So, if the debate is about the wearing of bow ties in the consulting room, and the Policy Lead asks it to be taken as a reference so the spirit of wearing a tie but not the actual type of tie be taken as GPC policy, then you can decide – is the wearing of ties important, or is your proposal to insist on bow ties the critical issue – do not be swayed by the protestations of the Policy Lead – it is up to you!

Summing Up

It is your conference, you are here to tell GPC (E) what you want, so all debates allow for a final summing up by the original proposer of the motion, allowing you to address any issues raised in debate (succinctly please!), including the issue of taking the vote as a reference... and then you vote.
**Voting**

Firstly, only representatives of LMCs may vote, except in elections for Agenda Committee, Chair and Deputy Chair of Conference.

**Standing Order 60.** Except as provided for in standing orders 63 (election of chair of conference), 64 (election of deputy chair of conference), and 65 (election of five members of the agenda committee), only representatives of local medical committees may vote.

Secondly, not all motions reach the point of a vote – there may be occasions when the assembled LMC representatives feel the motion, if voted on, would be damaging or dangerous and a call may then be heard for a move to next business. This call means that debate stops, the motion proposer is asked to agree either that the whole motion or the part under consideration is ignored, that no vote on the motion is taken and that conference moves on to the next motion or part of the motion, or may oppose the call to move to next business. In the latter case, the proposer is invited to state why the debate and vote on the motion should continue. But, and here it gets confusing, he or she is not at this point to continue the debate on the motion, but only whether the motion be heard. Following the appeal by the proposer not to proceed to next business, there is a vote - not on the motion, just on the procedure for the cessation of debate. This vote requires a 2/3 majority.

**Standing Order 47** - If there be a call by acclamation to move to next business it shall be the chairman’s discretion whether the call is heard. If it is heard then the proposer of the original motion can choose to:

(i) accept the call to move to next business for the whole motion
(ii) accept the call to move to next business for one or more subsections of the motion
(iii) have one minute to oppose the call to move to next business.

Conference will then vote on the motion to move to next business and a 2/3 majority is required for it to succeed.

Now, all please get two paracetamol, a damp cloth for the furrowed brow and lie down in a darkened room... and if you understand all that, well done.

Voting itself is basically simple – most votes are by show of cards - no card, no vote – or occasionally by electronic key pad – no key pad, no vote – so please look after both. The choice of what type of vote is at the discretion of the Chair.

**Standing Order 62** - Voting shall be, at the discretion of the chair, by a show of voting cards or electronically.

If the chair requires a count this will be by electronic voting.

Most votes are by simple majority, unless the motion being debated is one that relates to the constitution and organisation of either LMC Conference or GPC England itself, or a matter that will cost the General Practitioners Defence Fund (GPDF) money – then a 2/3 majority is needed.

**Standing Order 61** - Except as provided for in standing order 46 and 47 (procedural motions), decisions of the conference shall be determined by simple majorities of those present and voting, except that the following will also require a two-thirds majority of those present and voting:

61.1 any change of conference policy relating to the constitution and/or organisation of the LMC/conference/GPC England structure, or
61.2 a decision which could materially affect the GPDF Ltd funds.

**Themed debate**

Sometimes the agenda committee will group together a number of motions which they feel cannot be dealt with through traditional debate (for instance because there are particularly controversial or because there are such a high volume of motions on the same subject). These motions are then set aside in a themed motion session (in this case the themed debate is on GP or practice workforce), and representatives will have the opportunity to submit to the GPC England Executive questions on that subject which representatives will then vote on (on the day of conference) those questions they want to hear the Executive answer.
Quorum

The Conference of England LMCs is your conference - if you are not in attendance, then business cannot continue and when the numbers still in the hall fall below 1/3 of the appointed representatives, then business stops. So even if you are not interested in the latest dispensing, rural or inner city motion, please show respect for your colleagues and stay in the hall for the debates.

**Standing Order 57** - No business shall be transacted at any conference unless at least one-third of the number of representatives appointed to attend are present.

Suspension of Standing Orders

Sometimes things just get out of hand. At times, everything is so slick that we are way ahead of the timetable. Unusual circumstances may occur that require a procedure not covered by the drafted standing orders. In that situation the Chair can call for a ‘suspension of standing orders’. You, however, do not have to agree and indeed 2/3 of you must agree before this can happen, but the procedure exists.

**Standing Order 16** - Any decision to suspend one or more of the standing orders shall require a two-thirds majority of those representatives present and voting at the conference.

Finally, and probably the most important of all procedures, standing orders, etc – the Chair’s word is Law – not the Chair of GPC England (who is an invitee to your Conference), but the Chair of Conference.

**Standing Order 71** - Any question arising in relation to the conduct of the conference, which is not dealt with in these standing orders, shall be determined at the chair’s absolute discretion.