Conducting inclusive virtual committee meetings: a guide for chairs

Introduction

We are committed to fostering an open and inclusive culture where everybody feels able to contribute and that their contributions are valued. As part of this we offer participation at BMA committee meetings through video-conferencing (VC) and tele-conferencing (TC). Where members indicate they wish to attend a committee meeting via VC or TC we will make this possible.

This guide provides guidance to chairs who are conducting virtual meetings, whether they are in the meeting room themselves, or whether they are joining remotely.

Preparation for virtual meetings
At the BMA we use Skype for Business for those who would like to VC or TC in. This is an easy and simple system to access.

- **Accessing the meeting via Skype:** click on the ‘Join Skype Meeting’ link that will appear on the calendar invite sent by the organiser. This link will take you straight to the meeting room. If you are joining the meeting by phone, dial the number shown under the ‘Join by phone’ heading to join the meeting. Where you can, type in your name, so that the Chair and other participants easily know who is online.

- **Camera:** everyone should be able to see you so make sure there is nothing blocking the camera and avoid sitting with your back to a window (close blinds or curtains if necessary). You can turn your camera off when you are not talking if you prefer.

- **Microphone:** mute your microphone when not talking to avoid sending feedback round the system. This can be minimised through using a headset.

- **Headsets:** recommended for chairs joining remotely. The device’s microphone and speaker may be sufficient where there is minimal background noise; however, chairs should have a headset readily available.

- **Screen:** the screen should display each remote participant as well as the meeting room. For larger meetings, a staff member will operate the camera via the remote control pre-sets.
Ahead of the meeting
All participants, including the chair and staff member hosting the meeting, are encouraged to join the meeting 10 minutes ahead of the start time.

A staff member with the responsibility for remote joining should be identified as the first point of contact for remote participants prior to the meeting. The staff member will be responsible for checking that the room selected is suitable for a video meeting, testing that all technology is working, providing support to the virtual meeting participants and making sure that there is a backup option and that participants have the details of the backup option. If anybody is having trouble, they should know to contact that staff member. As the chair, you will be briefed before the meeting on who will be joining via VC/TC as well as the backup plan in the event of any connection issues.

Key points to remember:

– Participants joining via skype, including remote chairs, are advised to conduct the meeting in a private location. If the chair notices someone has called in while driving, they should advise the participant that it is not safe and possibly illegal.
– You have the option of using any BMA office that maybe more local to you to join meetings, which could save you time rather than travelling long distance and be more convenient for you. Please tell the meeting organiser/s in advance if you want to make use of this option as a room will need to be booked in the relevant office.
– If you are able to cameras should be turned on and participants are encouraged to be visible throughout the meeting. Inside the meeting room, the chair should sit where they are clearly visible to both participants in the room and remote participants.
– If possible, the chair should try to make eye contact with the camera so remote participants can see who is talking and feel part of the meeting.

A Checklist for members joining a meeting (see Appendix 1) is available to participants and remote chairs and should be read once the VC meeting is confirmed.

During the meeting and meeting etiquette
Some key points to remember when hosting a completely virtual meeting, or a meeting where there are members joining virtually:

1. Begin the meeting by welcoming everybody. Remember to welcome members joining via VC/TC specifically. The staff member responsible for the meeting should have told you in advance who is expected to join remotely.
2. In rooms where microphones are used, the chair should remind participants to use their microphones before speaking.
3. Remember to make eye contact with the camera and check in with remote participants so they feel included.
4. In smaller meetings, ask each participant to introduce themselves.
5. Explain how questions or comments will be handled e.g. participants wishing to speak can indicate by holding up their hand or text using the conversation screen on the left-hand side of skype. To enable this, click on the speech IM rectangle in the left-hand bottom area of the screen.
6. Ask remote participants to mute their microphone when not speaking. This will help reduce any feedback.
7. Be mindful of noises next to the microphone/s such as the rustling of papers or typing and remind all participants to put their mobile phones on silent or switch them off.
8. Check that those on VC/TC are able to hear.
9. Ensure that only one person is speaking at one time and wait for the remote participant to finish before replying as there might be a delay with VC.
10. When ending the meeting, ask those on VC/TC whether they have any AOB or closing comments.
Voting
In meetings where voting takes place, a process for voting is to be agreed upon by the chair and relevant staff member/s in advance of the meeting.

In smaller meetings, it is important to check that all participants, on VC/TC or otherwise, have had the chance to contribute prior to voting.
1. The process for voting (agreed prior to the meeting) will be shared with participants before voting commences.
2. A show of hands will be recorded by the relevant staff member and shared in the meeting during the count.
3. In a roll-call vote, members will be individually asked for their vote and the vote will be recorded in line with the rest of the committee.
4. In a secret vote, members will be asked to email the dedicated staff member and the total number of votes will be shared.

Support from staff
Contact the BMA staff member for the meeting for support and ensure that any requirements are sent through well in advance of the meeting.

Feedback on this guidance
This guidance was developed by the BMA corporate development directorate. Should you have any feedback or updates to this policy please email: corporate.development@bma.org.uk
Appendix 1

Checklist for members joining a meeting via VC

1. Is your internet connection reliable? Connecting via a home or business network is recommended as public networks are often slower.
2. Have you got the most up-to-date version of Skype?
3. Do you have the meeting link? It will look like this:

   → Join Skype Meeting
   Trouble Joining? Try Skype Web App.

Join by phone
Toll number: +442037874277, 825719909# (Dial-in Number) English (UK)
Find a local number
Conference ID: 825719909
Forgot your dial-in PIN? | Help | Legal

4. Are you in a private location?
5. Can you join the meeting 10 minutes early? Have you confirmed which staff member will be responsible for remote joining and voting (if applicable)?
6. Can you be clearly seen on camera?
7. Do you know how to mute your microphone/speaker? Remember to turn this on at the beginning of the meeting and turn it off each time after you have spoken.
8. If you intend to share visuals, is your text at least 12-point font size or above, in Calibri or Arial?

BMA location addresses

National offices
– BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP – Tel: 020 7378 4499
– BMA Scotland, 14 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1LL – Tel: 0131 247 3000
– BMA Wales, 5th Floor, 2 Caspian Point, Caspian Way, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff CF10 4DQ – Tel: 029 2047 4646
– BMA N.Ireland, 16 Cromac Place, Cromac Wood, Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 2JB – Tel: 028 9026 9666

Regional centres
Please check with regional centres beforehand to see if there is a suitable space available:
– Northern centre, Gladstone House, Redvers Close, Lawnswood Business Park, Leeds LS16 6SS – Tel: 0113 261 8325
– Southern centre, 6th floor, Knollys House, 17 Addiscombe Road, Croydon, CR0 6SR – Tel: 020 8655 8839
– North West centre, 35 Seymour Terrace, Liverpool L3 5PE – Tel: 0151 709 5660