
Conducting inclusive virtual committee meetings: a guide for chairs, co-chairs, and deputy chairs



Why inclusion is important

Inclusion and fairness are at the heart of the work of the BMA. It helps us ensure that we are properly representative of the doctors we speak for and negotiate on behalf of. Inclusiveness has also been shown to help organisations make better decisions; therefore, we aim to ensure that we are fully accessible to all and remove barriers to participation in BMA activities for our members, staff, and stakeholders.

To help you achieve these objectives we recommend attending the effective chairing training developed specifically for BMA committee chairs, co-chairs, deputy chairs and secretariat staff. Please contact corporate.edi@bma.org.uk for further details.

This guidance aims to help those chairing remote/virtual meetings to be as inclusive as possible, and that the views and contributions of all are heard and respected.

Preparing for the meeting

The committee chairs, co-chairs, and deputy chairs will be informed prior to the meeting which staff member is the first point of contact to support attendees needing assistance with joining the virtual meeting. As the chair of the meeting, where appropriate, you will be briefed if a participant has requested for any adjustments to be made in the way that the meeting is conducted. For example, a participant may ask that speakers make introductions and say their name before they speak.

You will also be briefed before the meeting on any backup arrangements should participants have any issues joining remotely. Please also make prior arrangements for an assigned deputy; in case you experience any technical issues, the deputy should be prepared to take over chairing the meeting until these issues are resolved.

Be mindful that committee members may process information in different ways and at different speeds and so papers should be shared at least a week in advance of the meeting if possible, and consider whether alternative formats might be helpful (eg having a recording of an update that could be listened to rather than read).

Camera

- Where you have video capabilities, please make sure that there is nothing blocking the camera and avoid sitting with your back to a window (close blinds or curtains if necessary) or other light sources.
- Speakers should aim to use a well-lit space for video meetings and avoid backgrounds that are too 'busy' so that those with visual or auditory impairments may better understand them (eg through lipreading).
- If you are experiencing broadband delays it may be helpful to turn off the incoming videos of the other attendees. This can be done by clicking on the three dots on the top of the Microsoft Teams app/meeting window that leads to 'More actions', scroll to the bottom and click 'Turn off incoming video' – the other attendees will still be able to see you, but you will only see their display name or picture.
- You should turn your camera off during long presentations or breaks, items in which you are not participating, and if there are broadband delays that cannot be resolved.

Sound

- Your device's microphone and speaker may be sufficient where there is minimal background noise; however, a headset is recommended to ensure a good audio experience for all participants. This is particularly important so that those with auditory impairments can hear you clearly.
- Please remember to mute your microphone when you are not speaking to avoid creating feedback and echoes—and kindly remind other participants to do the same.
- Encourage participants to find a quiet, private location for the meeting to minimise disruption and background noise, and to be mindful of noises such as the rustling of papers or typing close to the microphone/s. Remind all participants to enable silent mode or switch off their phones.

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.

During meetings, it is important to check that all participants 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 counted by the relevant staff member and shared in the meeting during the count.
3. In a roll-call vote, each member will be asked for their vote and the vote will be recorded.
4. In a secret vote, members will be asked to email the dedicated staff member and the total number of votes will be shared.

Setting the agenda

Breaks

- Ensure that ample breaks are scheduled during meetings – we recommend a 15-minute break as standard. If one or more breaks are scheduled during the meeting, please inform the attendees what time to expect the break and how long it will be. This will reduce the likelihood of attendees excusing themselves during the meeting. We advise that, whenever possible, longer meetings have a break every 60-75 minutes and these should be explicitly scheduled in agendas.
- Breaks may be used to accommodate for those conducting prayers or other religious observances, those who have health requirements or for those who are feeding or expressing milk upon returning to work after those who have health or caring requirements.
- Dedicating informal discussion time at the beginning and/or at the end of each meeting can help build personal connections and encourage positive team culture.

Breakout rooms

- To enable discussion and collaboration in smaller groups, keep in mind that you can split your attendees into multiple virtual breakout rooms when using Microsoft Teams.

Presentations

- Be mindful of how much time will be used for presentations and allocate a sufficient amount of time for questions and discussion.
- Please ensure that any presentations are consistent with the BMA's values and that any visuals or language do not cause offence.
- Please use a font like Calibri that is clear to read, consistent in size, and displays a colour contrast of dark words against a light background.
- Create slides that are not too crowded with words. Describing the content of slides can also aid those with visual impairments.
- If you are using video clips, aim to use captions or audio description to aid those with hearing impairments.
- Where possible, share presentations with attendees in advance as some people may not be able to view presentations clearly through screen sharing on Microsoft Teams.

Tools

There are many tools available online to help make presentations interactive and engage participants. [Mentimeter](#), [PollEV](#) and [Slido](#) are a few examples of tools that facilitate live polls and Q&A. The BMA committee services team (committeesupport@bma.org.uk) can provide advice and answer any questions on Slido.

[Lucidspark](#) is another interactive tool that allows users or teams to collaborate during sessions using a virtual whiteboard application to capture ideas on digital sticky notes using freehand drawing tools. This could be a helpful tool for breakout groups.

If you are thinking of using such tools, please make sure to first discuss this with your committee secretariat for better guidance on which platforms can be utilised and are most accessible for attendees.

Joining the meeting

At the BMA we use Microsoft Teams for remote/virtual meetings.

To access the meeting virtually, open the calendar invite sent by the organiser and click **'Click here to join the meeting'**. This link will take you straight to the meeting room. If you are joining the meeting by phone, dial the number shown under **'Or call in (audio only)'** listed in the meeting invite. Enter the conference ID and speak your name when prompted. You should note that there are certain functions of Teams that you will not be able to access if you join the meeting by phone.

The Checklist for joining a meeting via VC/TC (see Appendix 1) should be read once it is confirmed that the meeting will be held remotely.

General meeting etiquette and considerations

Housekeeping reminders

- All participants, including the chair/s, deputy chair/s and staff member/s hosting the meeting, are encouraged to join a few minutes ahead of the start time to address any technical difficulties and ensure that any assistive technology is functioning.
- You can begin by introducing the meeting itself, its purpose and context, and by outlining any information or papers that members should have read in advance.
- Start by welcoming all attendees; then, depending on the size, duration of the meeting, and how familiar attendees are with each other, you may ask each participant to introduce themselves. You may find it easier to work through the list of members appended within the agenda rather than call upon members from the screen.
- Please explain how you will moderate questions or comments if participants wish to speak, they can indicate this by typing RTS (Request to Speak) in the chat or by clicking on 'Raise hand' within Teams. It may be difficult for those with visual impairments to read the chat alongside any presentations or on-screen speakers, so please ensure that as the chair, you check the chat bar and select 'Show participants' to see the list of attendees. Those who have raised their hand will have a hand icon beside their name show listed in the order they raised them. Members calling into the meeting by phone should be encouraged to e-mail the secretariat if they wish to speak on an item. If that is not possible, you should invite them to contribute to the discussion.
- Encourage participants to use their webcams when they speak but make sure attendees know that video is optional. Personal preferences are respected if participants are not comfortable being on camera.
- Participants should mute their microphones when they are not speaking, which also applies to the meeting presenter as well.

Technical difficulties

- Be sure to wait for participants to finish speaking before replying as there might be delays on audio and video feeds.
- Let attendees know who the designated contact person for the meeting is in case any attendees experience technical difficulties.
- If anybody calls into a meeting from a mobile phone while driving, they should be advised to disconnect the call as it is not safe and possibly illegal.

Accessibility needs and inclusive chairing

- Please be mindful that attendees may have hidden and visible conditions and disabilities, and there may be participants who have neurodivergent forms of processing information. Advice and guidance on accommodating those with all forms of neurodiversity are provided by [ACAS](#).
- If you are unsure how to pronounce an attendee's name, please try to check pronunciation beforehand. If this is not possible, be sure to acknowledge that you may be mispronouncing the person's name and ask for the correct pronunciation before introducing the person.
- When moving on to a new agenda item, invite those who have not yet spoken during the meeting to speak first to ensure greater inclusion for all attendees. For example, there is evidence that shows calling on women to speak first on an item encourages greater participation from other women in meetings.
- Ensure that several members have the opportunity to speak and engage in a dialogue before the presenter or the chair responds. This allows the meeting to feel more inclusive and helps different perspectives be voiced.
- If you wish to participate in a debate on a particular agenda item, it would be helpful to identify another committee officer, for example, the deputy chair, and request them to chair that part of the meeting.
- Be mindful that continuing business from meetings outside of allocated time can exclude those who cannot or choose not to attend informal follow-up events. If the meeting is overrunning its allocated time, please check if participants are able to continue. If the meeting must end, please offer the option of continuing discussions through an email thread or listserv or ask if attendees wish to arrange a follow-up meeting.

Captions

- Microsoft Teams has a 'Live captions' function which detects spoken language and creates real-time captions for meeting participants who may have hearing impairments or for those whose first language may not be English – we advise that this function is activated in Teams meetings as standard. Please note that live captions will only be viewed by those who turn the captions on during the meeting. Read more about this function at this [link](#).

Using inclusive language

- All language should be respectful, inclusive, and solution focused.
- If possible, please avoid using too many subject-specific acronyms or develop a list of acronyms commonly used in discussion to avoid difficulty and help attendees understand.
- Using gender-neutral language allows people of all genders to feel included, for example, using 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she'.
- When introducing yourself, please consider including your pronouns (eg 'My name is X and my pronouns are she/her'). For more information on pronouns and using gender-inclusive language, visit [mypronouns.org](#).
- Please use consistency and sensitivity around attendees' pronouns and titles, and use attendees' preferred titles or forms of address, such as Ms, Dr, or Professor. It may be helpful to ask attendees to enter their full and preferred name on Microsoft Teams so that others know how they wish to be addressed.

Feedback

- At the end of the meeting, ask committee members for feedback to improve the running of the meeting (eg 'What is your overall assessment of the meeting?' 1 = inadequate - 5 = excellent, 'Which topics or aspects of the meeting did you find most interesting or useful?'). These questions may be presented in a form or a Slido poll.

Meeting behaviour

- It is the responsibility of BMA members to role model and promote positive behaviours, and to encourage a culture of inclusion and respect at the BMA. The BMA's behaviour principles set out how all BMA members should conduct themselves whenever they engage in BMA business or represent the BMA. They have been created by members for members with the purpose of providing a shared understanding of expectations for behaviour.

The behaviour principles are:

- Be professional
- Be accountable
- Be kind
- Be representative
- Respect others



During meetings all members must behave in line with the [BMA code of conduct](#) and [behaviour principles](#), and observe the [BMA's confidentiality policy](#).

The role of the chair includes challenging any inappropriate behaviour or language within a meeting, follow up with attendees that demonstrate inappropriate behaviour and de-escalate when necessary. The BMA's behaviour principles and 'dealing with difficult behaviour' are covered in the BMA's Chair and Deputy Chair and Active Bystander training programmes. For more information on these trainings, please contact the corporate equality, diversity and inclusion team at corporate.edi@bma.org.uk.

Support from staff

If you require any support, please contact the BMA staff member responsible for the meeting or your committee secretariat so that any requirements are sent through well in advance of the meeting.

If you have any queries about this guidance, please contact the BMA corporate equality, diversity and inclusion team at corporate.edi@bma.org.uk.

BMA locations

National offices

BMA House
Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP
Tel: 020 7387 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 Northern Ireland

16 Cromac Place, Cromac Wood, Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 2JB
Tel: 028 9026 9666

Additional resources

Axtell P (2016), [What Everyone Should Know About Running Virtual Meetings](#), *Harvard Business Review*.

Edmondson A and Daley G (2020), [How to Foster Psychological Safety in Virtual Meetings](#), *Harvard Business Review*.

Ferrazzi K (2015), [How to Run a Great Virtual Meeting](#), *Harvard Business Review*.

Frisch B and Greene C (2020), [What It Takes to Run a Great Virtual Meeting](#), *Harvard Business Review*.

Hale J and Grenny J (2020), [How to Get People to Actually Participate in Virtual Meetings](#), *Harvard Business Review*.

Molinsky A (2020), [Virtual Meetings Don't Have to be a Bore](#), *Harvard Business Review*.

Appendix 1

Checklist for joining a meeting via VC/TC

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 a device with webcam and headset?
3. Do you have the meeting link? It will look like this:

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join on your computer or mobile app

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Or call in (audio only)

[+44 20 3787 4277,,894722089#](#) United Kingdom, London

Phone Conference ID: 894 722 089#

[Find a local number](#) | [Reset PIN](#)



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[Learn More](#) | [Meeting options](#) | [Legal](#)

4. Are you in a private location?
5. Can you join the meeting 10 minutes early?
6. Have you confirmed which staff member will be responsible for remote joining and voting (if applicable)?
7. Can you be clearly seen on camera?
8. 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.
9. If you intend to share visuals, is your text at least 12-point font size or above, in Calibri or Arial?

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