

Future
Options
for UK LMC
Conference



Background

At the 2023 UK LMC Conference there were workshops on the future of the UK Conference and later that day conference passed the following motion:

25 HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT: That conference believes that the current format of the UK conference of LMCs is no longer as relevant compared to nation specific conferences due to the divergence of contracts across the four UK nations (and the consequent limited number of UK issues for debate). Conference therefore requests a wholesale review of the current format of the UK Conference of LMCs, and such a review to report back in advance of the 2024 UK conference of LMCs and to include reflections on:

- (i) relevance to all four UK nations and subject matter for debate
- (ii) timing and length of conference
- (iii) cost of conference including costs for individual LMCs
- (iv) method of attendance including virtual and hybrid options
- (v) recommendations for future formats.

The Agenda Committee (AC) has therefore been tasked with reviewing various aspects of UK Conference given there is now a GPC England and GPC UK as well as an England LMC Conference. We have tried to remain as true to Motion 25 as possible in our review. From the motion passed at conference this should cover:

- Relevance to all 4 nations
- Timing/length
- Cost*
- Method of attendance
- Recommendations for future

The Agenda Committee met on 8th September 2023 to discuss these topics and reviewed the feedback from the conference workshop and conference feedback returned by attendees. Following this the chair and deputy chair were then tasked to draw up a report for presentation to the 2024 UK LMC Conference in Newport.

We identified four key areas to look at:

- Purpose of conference with regard to policy formation (covers 4 nation relevance)
- Purpose of conference in other ways (CPD, Networking, Collaboration) which covers “recommendations for future”
- Attendance options, e.g. hybrid, face-to-face (covers cost, timing/length and method of attendance)
- Making conference more inclusive, relevant, and reactive (covers recommendations for future, relevance to 4 nations)

** Regarding the cost of Conference, we consulted the BMA and GPDF, requesting itemised data on the costs of past conferences including pre-pandemic and virtual, asking for data back as far as Edinburgh 2017. We understand that GPDF are undertaking a separate piece of work to identify this data and aim to present further financial detail to Conference in due course.*

Purpose of the UK LMC Conference – Policy Formation

From the perspective of pure policy, it is considered important that we continue to hold a four-nation UK conference for the following reasons:

- There are still some matters of policy which remain to be debated at a UK wide level – e.g. training, pensions, sessionals, regulation, ethics, certain clinical matters, DDRB, and UK wide representation
- The UK LMC Conference is the branch of practice conference for GPs within the BMA, and is the mechanism by which General Practice is connected with and integrated into the wider BMA – e.g. via the ARM
- Devolved nations continue to present certain issues to UK Conference for the purpose of raising awareness and garnering UK-wide support for their nation to be levelled up – e.g. indemnity in Northern Ireland, seniority payments in England

In addition it was noted that there is an opportunity for shared learning between the nations around their devolved contracts and what works well and what doesn't.

Whilst the Agenda Committee works hard to ensure single nation motions are identified and not prioritised for debate, this is at the discretion of the incumbent members of the AC, and Standing Orders leave prioritisation of motions at the sole discretion of the Chair and AC.

Recommendation 1: That Standing Orders be amended to require that motions which are specific to a single nation may not be prioritised for debate, unless the devolved nation conference chair for that nation has requested it be raised to a UK level.

Some nations (Scotland & Wales) have passed motions at their devolved nation conferences to ensure that policy passed at the UK Conference may be disregarded by their devolved nation GPC if it conflicts with their own devolved nation conference policy. This is, in our view, a helpful clarification as it ensures the autonomy of devolved nations to set their own policy, and to not have policy dictated to them from a UK level. The motions which effected this change were as follows:

WELSH CONFERENCE OF LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEES: Conference, it is time for you to exercise your devolved responsibility in dictating the policy direction of your GPC.

- (i) Conference calls on GPCW to disregard any motions passed by UKLMC conference, in which GPC (UK or devolved) has been directed to negotiate policy in Wales, until such a motion has been passed by Welsh Conference of LMCs.
- (ii) The Agenda Committee of Welsh LMC conference will consider the inclusion of any motion passed by UKLMC that directs devolved nation GPCs to create new policy.

SCOTTISH CONFERENCE OF LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEES: That this conference recognises that health is devolved, and motions passed at the UK LMC conference may be contrary to the wishes or desire of Scottish LMCs and calls on:

- (i) SGPC to disregard any motion passed at UK LMC conference which would direct SGPC to create new policy in Scotland, until such a motion is passed at Scottish LMC conference
- (ii) the agenda committee of Scottish LMC conference to consider the inclusion of any motion passed at UK LMC conference that directs devolved nations to create new policy.

Furthermore, the Welsh LMC Conference 2024 recently exercised this change by highlighting which UK Conference resolutions from 2023 were to be disregarded, and also selected two motions from UK Conference for debate at their own conference, to make all or part of those motions firm Welsh devolved nation policy. This included the upgrading of a part of a motion taken as a reference at UK, to being firm policy in Wales. This helpfully demonstrates the benefits of UK Conference reform which we are trying to achieve.

Recommendation 2: That Standing Orders be amended to reflect the will of devolved nation conferences to clarify that UK Conference policy is directed to GPCUK, and shall neither bind nor direct any devolved nation GPC unless and until the LMC Conference for that devolved nation passes such policy.

Purpose of UK LMC Conference – CPD, Networking, Collaboration

One of the most important purposes for UK Conference highlighted by Reps in the 2023 breakout rooms was the opportunity to meet and network with colleagues from all over the UK. This is also a consistent theme from conference feedback.

Regarding the duration of conference, the clear feedback received was that members of conference felt the need for 2 days of overall conference time and didn't feel it should be shortened. The AC also discussed the LMC Secretaries Conference (Sec Conf) which was also discussed in most of the workshops at the 2023 UK Conference. Sec Conf is an annual one day conference held in BMA House in March. Unlike the policy forming functions of the annual conference, the Sec Conf agenda is focused on aspects of CPD relevant to LMCs and networking.

Sec Conf is open to one rep from each LMC with the ability to send others at LMCs expense subject to space. Normally, it is the LMC Secretary of any given LMC who attends, and the conference is usually entirely composed of senior LMC officers such as CEOs, Medical Directors, Chairs, or other "Secretariat." (*See Appendix 1 – Sec Conf Agenda 2024*)

The organisation and running of Sec Conf is the responsibility of the chair and deputy of the UK LMC Conference, with support from BMA staff. The AC notes that the majority of those attending Sec Conf also attend the annual UK LMC Conference, by virtue of their roles. Sec Conf consistently receives excellent feedback but it is noted that it is normally the same LMC reps who attend (LMC Secretaries) and as it is always in London, this potentially disadvantages LMCs from the other nations, and from those parts of England further from London.

The Agenda Committee believes that, given the excellent feedback around Sec Conf, and its established function as a CPD and networking opportunity, it is unsatisfactory that its benefits are not open to the wider membership of the UK Conference.

Furthermore, given the repeated calls by UK Conference reps for UK Conference to have a strong CPD element, Sec Conf seems like an obvious resource currently being underutilised. Combining Sec Conf into the UK Conference would have several benefits:

- Opening up CPD resources to a wider audience, improving inclusivity
- Providing LMC Reps with CPD on the function, structure and running of LMCs potentially raises new future LMC officers, diversifying the resource open to LMCs
- Reduced environmental impact by reduced travel
- Cost savings by only one set of travel for reps travelling greater distances
- Improved four-nation access by Sec Conf rotating around the UK

Recommendation 3: That the LMC Secretaries Conference (Sec Conf) is a valued resource for LMCs, and it should be combined with the UK Conference on a trial basis in order for its advantages to be more widely available to all members of Conference.

In order to balance policy debating time, time for Reps away from practice, value for money, and venue logistics, there are several options if Conference chooses to indeed combine Sec Conf with the annual UK Conference, with varying factors which must be borne in mind.

Option 1 – No change

This option is cost neutral and keeps the status quo. Could still look to find ways to increase networking and CPD within the 2-day UK Conference. There would then be 3 days of UK wide conference in total, with duplication of CPD and networking which already exists.

Option 2 – Run Sec Conf the day before UK Conference at the same venue.

This would create a 3-day event for some. Environmentally and from cost point of view this would reduce travel as only travelling to one venue each year for those that attend both. In addition, there would only be setup and breakdown for one conference not two, and the simplification of not needing BMA House for a separate day. It might also allow more LMC reps from nations other than England to attend the Sec Conf. It would however require the conference venue for an additional day and accommodation costs would be affected by some reps being at UK Conference an extra day though accommodation costs will normally not be London costs, however some of these accommodation costs would be offset by the accommodation costs removed from a separate Sec Conf. One could potentially use the same registration process as UK Conference but extend with option where appropriate to also register to attend Sec Conf, for example by having two different classes of delegate at registration, two different badges etc.

The disadvantage of this would be the creation of a two tier conference, with no increase in inclusivity of the resources of Sec Conf. Also, this creates a large block of time for some Reps to be away from work/practice, which could actually worsen inclusivity.

Option 3 – Merge Sec Conf and UK Conference into 2 days with loss of debate and CPD

This would have the environmental benefits of option 2, with reduced travel, set up costs, accommodation and venue hire. It would however reduce the time for debate of motions at conference to one day which from feedback may not be popular. It may also not be popular with those normally attending Sec Conf, as some of the CPD/networking time would be lost. Further, as two full days would be needed, hotel cost savings would be reduced.

Option 4 – Merge Sec Conf and UK Conference into 2.5 days, with some loss of debate

This might take the format of starting after lunch on first day with CPD and networking which would normally only occur at Sec Conf. The second half of Sec Conf material could then be incorporated into UK Conference, breaking up the agenda more and introducing more variety. As the venue size would be the same, anyone who wished to arrive for day one could do so, increasing inclusivity, whilst those who only wished to attend for debate and/or cannot be away from practice for the full duration can arrive in time for day two, whilst still gaining access to some of the Sec Conf material.

This option would require venue for the 3 days, but would give the crew more time for setup before the first day. It would have environmental and cost benefit from reduced travel and setup. Debating time would only be reduced by half a day for UK Conference, but as the rest of this review document shows, there is an argument for quality over quantity of UK debate. Furthermore, starting day one in the middle of the day would allow many to travel the morning of that day, reducing overnight accommodation costs.

Conference Dinner

Feedback in the breakout rooms at UK Conference 2023, and feedback forms completed by Reps, strongly supported a conference dinner as an important networking opportunity. Furthermore, the current UK Standing Orders require a UK Conference dinner.

72. Dinner committee

72.1 At each conference there shall be appointed a conference dinner committee, formed of the chair and deputy chair of the conference and the chair of the GPC, to take all necessary steps to arrange for a dinner to be held at the time of the following annual conference, to which the members of the GPC, amongst others, shall be invited as guests of the conference.

External feedback from the GPDF Board has also supported the UK Conference dinner as an important event. GPDF has historically provided a key role in supporting and subsidising the dinner, although there has been a lack of clarity on what form this should take. In prior years, huge variation in workload upon the chair has been demonstrated in the organisation of what is an extremely complex social event of over 400 people. Clarification is needed on the scope of GPDF in supporting the dinner, to enable both GPDF and future UK Conference chairs to have clarity of what support, both financial and otherwise, is expected by Conference in organising the dinner.

GPDF has expressed that it does not wish to in any way subsidise alcohol. Indeed, it seems neither diverse nor inclusive for those who do not drink for a variety of reasons to be subsidising alcohol via a single ticket price. It therefore seems reasonable, and has been agreed for the Newport 2024 dinner, that GPDF shall fund the cost of food, the venue, basic décor, and essential overheads; whilst the costs of alcohol and entertainment shall fall to Reps or, by extension, to LMCs.

Recommendation 4: GPDF should continue to subsidise and support the delivery of a conference dinner, aside from expenses for alcohol.

Attendance Options

Feedback from breakout rooms was broadly in agreement that rotating conference through all four nations is important to its definition as a four nation UK Conference.

Recommendation 5: The venue for the UK LMC Conference should rotate through the four nations. When deciding the venue, the chair shall consult with devolved nation conference and GPC chairs, to ensure a venue which showcases the host nation and is optimal for travel and accommodation.

The question was raised as to whether the time of year for conference could be adjusted. However, as conference is required to feed policy into the ARM via the Joint Agenda Committee (JAC) and also is fed into by the devolved nation conferences, it would be impractical to move the date of the UK Conference more than a couple of weeks away from its current position in May. It should be noted, however, that a margin of a few weeks within May is accounted for to minimise clashes with major religious holidays, school holidays, and to cater for venue availability.

The Agenda Committee is aware of the desire to reduce the environmental impact of conference. This could be achieved by moving to an entirely virtual conference. However these have suffered from technical issues in the past and feedback has suggested a lack of confidence in the representativeness of a virtual conference with regard to the ability to have robust debate, to flag urgent points of order/information, and potentially shifts the balance of control too far away from conference itself.

A Hybrid option rather than full in person attendance might be a compromise. It would reduce environmental impact from reduced travelling and might allow those where travel is more complicated to still attend. It is unclear whether the potential savings from reduced expenses (travel, hotel and possibly smaller venue) would be realised once the added cost of the technology are added on. The BMA has advised that based on experience of running hybrid options for

other conferences, including the ARM, the additional cost to GPDF of a hybrid option would be circa £50,000. In addition, those reps attending virtually would find engagement with breakout rooms, workshops, and networking difficult. Another difficulty with a hybrid option is the ability to accurately count votes, as there would be two cohorts of voters (online and in the room); this has proven an obstacle at the ARM. We have also probably all suffered from attending virtual/hybrid meetings where technical issues seriously disrupt business. Finally, organisation of a hybrid conference places various additional complications on the workload of the Agenda Committee and staff; whilst it could be possible, it would significantly impact the running speed of conference, particularly by the slowness of voting time, and hence debating time would be likely greatly reduced, arguably cancelling out any potential gains.

A potential compromise could be to keep the policy forming and networking components of conference face to face (with their existing live streams), whilst opening the CPD aspects (from Sec Conf) to online interaction, to make these resources available to a wider audience of reps.

Recommendation 6: The AC does not recommend converting the UK LMC Conference to hybrid in its entirety, but rather would recommend exploring more inclusive online/digital options for any CPD components which are introduced.

Making conference more Inclusive, Relevant, and Reactive

The feedback received from conference was clear that we need to ensure conference is relevant to all 4 nations. Standing Orders were changed several years ago to ensure representation on the AC from all 4 nations (as long as there are nominations from all 4 nations) and this year Conference has elected a chair and deputy chair from different nations. The AC hopes this will help to ensure motions and workshops are relevant to all 4 nations. However, more can be done to maximise the inclusivity of Conference and the relevance of subject matter for debate, to ensure Conference is fully equipped to react to the challenges that general practice faces across the UK.

Changes Already Being Implemented

The Agenda Committee have been introducing some changes to the way in which the conference is conducted, how motions are selected for debate and who proposes them, how debate is conducted, and the promotion of inclusive debate. These changes include:

- The collation of data going back ten years on which LMCs attend conference, submit motions, and have been selected to propose motions. This enables the AC to choose LMCs who may not have spoken often to propose motions, and ensure greater numbers of new speakers.
- The separation of “Part 2” of the Agenda into 2a and 2b, to differentiate between those motions which are incompetent for whatever reason (e.g. procedural reasons, single nation), vs those motions which simply were not selected due to lack of time. This is being implemented for the 2024 Conference and it is hoped this will:
 - Provide some feedback to LMCs as to why a motion was not prioritised
 - Assist LMCs in the selection of Chosen Motions which may be more effective at forming policy
- The use of the voting cards as a general temperature check. This was piloted at the 2023 Conference, and is used at Themed Debates, to enable reps to silently and respectfully indicate their support/opposition to a particular point being raised. This provides the top table with a valuable temperature check on the feeling in the room on specific issues in the debate.
- Greater use of breakout rooms/workshops to promote qualitative rather than binary debate, in line with feedback from prior conferences.

Calculation of Representative Numbers

Although not specifically mentioned in Motion 25, the membership of Conference pertains to all four key areas of discussion in this paper, hence it is worthy of mention. However, it should be clearly noted that reforms to the membership of Conference itself pose potential unintended consequences to UK wide representative matters such as devolved nation conferences, GPC UK elections, devolved nation GPCs, and costs to GPDF. Therefore, this paper only superficially explores the issue of the calculation of allocation of Representative numbers, caveating the caution on the issues mentioned above.

Currently, the allocation of Representatives to each LMC is calculated such that each LMC receives 1 seat, and then all remaining seats are allocated on a pro rata basis calculated based on the number of GPs that each LMC represents. See the Standing Order below:

4. All local medical committees are entitled to appoint a representative to the conference.

5. The agenda committee shall each year allocate any remaining seats for representatives amongst LMCs. Allocation of additional seats shall be done in such a manner that ensures fair representation of LMCs according to the number of GPs they represent. Each year the agenda committee shall publish a list showing the number of representatives each LMC is entitled to appoint and the method of allocating the additional seats.

There are several difficulties with this method:

- It is arcane and has not been reviewed for many years, with no clarity as to whether it refers to head count or Full-Time-Equivalent (FTE)
- It is based on a statistic which many LMCs find difficult to accurately calculate, as GP numbers fluctuate, meaning statistics are often out of date
- It arguably does not take full account of sessional GPs, who are less likely to appear in an LMC head count, and some (e.g. locums, OOH) may work in multiple areas
- It disenfranchises those LMCs which cover areas where GP workforce has been diminished, recruitment is difficult, or there are greater numbers of GP vacancies, particularly in deprived areas – these are arguably the LMCs who need to be enfranchised the most
- It is different to how the levy is calculated, which is based on patient numbers
- It relies on returned data from LMCs, rather than being able to be calculated centrally
- Some larger LMCs do not use all their seat allocation, whilst other smaller LMCs with only their sole guaranteed seat only have 1 Rep

One alternative approach would be to calculate seat allocation based on patient population impartially collected from GPDF population figures used to calculate the GPDF quota (voluntary levy). However, a major potential pitfall of this would be the potential disenfranchisement of rural areas, and a more Anglocentric Conference – the opposite effect of the purpose of these reforms.

Alternatively, seats could be allocated in some other novel way, whilst nevertheless ensuring the four-nation composition of the UK Conference is not negatively impacted. Evidently, the review of the calculation of Rep allocations requires careful consideration:

Recommendation 7: That the Agenda Committee be asked to review the method of seat allocation to the UK Conference, in discussion and collaboration with GPC UK, to ensure a more inclusive Conference, whilst nevertheless ensuring that the four-nation balance of Conference is not in any way diminished, and ensuring Conference is representative of all constituencies

Another potential improvement could be to allocate all seats which remain empty and unregistered after the close of registrations in a given year, to those LMCs who only normally have 1 seat on a first-come-first-serve basis to better enfranchise smaller LMCs. Preference would need to be given to those LMCs from the same devolved nation as the empty seat, to ensure no loss of four nation representation. This has several advantages:

- Gender constraints could be applied to the distribution of these unallocated seats to ensure a more inclusive and diverse Conference
- Those LMCs who are only normally able to send one Representative would be able to improve their LMC Reps' exposure to Conference
- Improved four nation representation, as unused seats in a devolved nation would be utilised by that nation

Recommendation 8: That any seats allocated to an LMC which have not been registered by the registration deadline be made available to other LMCs, from the same nation, in a manner which maximises inclusivity and diversity.

Closing Remarks

The reforms to the UK Conference mandated by Motion 25, and made clear as the will of Conference in the breakout rooms of the 2023 Conference, are key to ensuring the UK Conference is relevant to all four nations, serves all four nations, and provides a platform and environment for LMCs across the UK to collaborate and support each other.

It must be noted that these reforms, like the reforms to GPC UK, must be iterative, lest we irreversibly transform our representative structure into a model which does not serve the above purposes. Prior attempted reforms to GPC in the past should serve as a warning that we not repeat the mistakes of history by not learning from them. We commend this paper and its recommendations to Conference and welcome your debate and thoughts.



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