
BMA inclusive meetings guidance



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Why inclusion is important

Inclusion and fairness are at the heart of the work of the BMA. Our aim is to ensure that we are fully accessible to all and that we remove barriers to participation in BMA activities for our members, staff and stakeholders.

This guidance aims to help those planning and running meetings to ensure they are as inclusive as possible, and that the views and contributions of all are heard and respected. If there are any queries about this guidance, please contact the corporate EDI team (corporate.edi@bma.org.uk).

This guidance is for all participants of BMA meetings (virtual, hybrid and in person): meeting attendees such as committee members, meeting chairs and staff who organise these meetings. The guidance replaces 'Conducting inclusive virtual committee meetings: a guide for chairs, co-chairs and deputy chairs', 'Inclusive virtual committee meetings: a guide for committee members' and 'Inclusive meetings: a guide for BMA staff'.

Scheduling meetings

- **Check for school holidays, public holidays, and religious or cultural observances** that might clash with proposed dates of meetings – be aware when planning late afternoon or evening meetings that some religious observances start at sunset. UK religious observances are listed on [the calendar](#) on The Loop, and at [this link](#).
- **Give at least six weeks' notice** of meetings whenever possible so that participants can plan their attendance accordingly.
- **Consider the length, start and end times of meetings so that those with caring responsibilities can attend.** Meetings should not be overly long to maximise engagement from attendees.
- **Remember to schedule breaks.** Aim to have a 15-minute break every 60-75 minutes, and these should be explicitly scheduled in agendas and kept to. Consider scheduling more frequent breaks during the winter months for those conducting prayers or other religious observances.
- **Add dial-in and remote access details to calendar invites** when these are sent out.
- **Inform attendees of the [BMA's family friendly fund](#)** which provides support for care arrangements to allow members to participate fully in BMA activities.
- **If meeting in person, provide a map of the meeting location and the room** the meeting is to be held in, along with the [BMA House accessibility guide](#) for face-to-face meetings.

Remember when sending communications:

- Use clear, concise and consistent language. Use clear subject lines in emails and a limited number of email chains.
- Ensure consistency and sensitivity around attendees' pronouns and titles and use attendees' preferred titles or forms of address, such as Ms, Dr or Professor.

As part of the induction process, be sure to ask new committee members if they have any accessibility needs or any support requirements – this ensures that all committee members can best engage with BMA activities from the beginning of their role.

Asking attendees about requirements

In all communications about a meeting, be sure to ask attendees if they have any accessibility needs or any support requirements, to please get in touch with the committee secretariat, who can provide support and assistance in making any necessary adjustments.

Be mindful of hidden and visible conditions and disabilities, including attendees who may process information differently.

Remember:

- If in BMA House, inform attendees that a quiet room and baby care/feeding room are available if these are needed. Other BMA offices have similar facilities available.
- If attending a meeting at BMA premises, attendees with accessibility requirements should complete a PEEP (personal emergency egress plan) form to ensure their health and safety needs are met in case of emergency. The PEEP form for staff and contractors can be found [here](#) and the form for visitors can be found [here](#).

Adjustments that participants may require can include:

Breaks (at least 5 minutes every hour) to accommodate some neurodivergent individuals, those with religious observances, those who have disabilities and/or health requirements or for those who are feeding or expressing milk.

Assistive technology such as hearing loops or software for accessing remote meetings (BMA technology services can assist if needed).

Agendas and papers printed in **large fonts (minimum 16 point)**.

Access to care facilities for children and dependants (check the [care support for BMA activities](#) for further information).

Choosing **meeting rooms near lifts for people with reduced mobility** (check the [BMA House accessibility guide](#) for further information).

Adjusted start and end times for those with caring responsibilities.

Share presentation slides in advance of the meeting.

Agendas, papers, presentations and other materials

- If appropriate, request suggestions for agenda items from attendees at least three weeks in advance of the meeting.
- The agenda and any papers should be shared at least one week, ideally two weeks, ahead of the meeting. If possible, any presentations should be shared in advance as well. Please ensure that the format of any papers or slides is accessible (i.e. adheres to the formatting guidelines specified below).
- If possible, inform attendees ahead of the meeting if their input will be needed on any items and how and when this will be carried out (i.e. if attendees will need to vote on a decision, or need to comment on a piece of work). Be sure to share any relevant papers for this.
- Where appropriate, encourage discussion of agenda items on the listserver to be inclusive of those who were unable to attend the meeting.
- Ensure the content of slides and presentations, including those of guest speakers, are consistent with the [BMA's values](#) and that any visuals or language do not cause offence.
- If using video clips, ensure that captions or audio description are available to aid those with hearing impairments.

Formatting guidelines for written content, including slides

Please ensure that any papers or slides formats are accessible by:

- Using a clear font, e.g., Arial or Calibri.
- Using a large enough font size (12-16).
- Using 1.5 line spacing.
- Using colour contrast of dark words against a light background.
- Using slides that are not too crowded.
- Describing the content of slides can aid those with visual impairments.
- Avoiding too many acronyms and overly complex language.
- Being mindful of the volume of numbers presented in a given section.

Chairing a meeting

Points to consider as a chair and be included in the chair's brief

- Advise the chair that if they are unsure how to pronounce a name, to acknowledge that they may be mispronouncing the person's name and ask for the correct pronunciation.
- Ensure that any new attendees are welcomed and signposted to resources and support.
- Chairs and staff should consider sharing their own pronouns (e.g. they/them, she/her, he/him, she/they, he/they) when introducing themselves and encouraging others to also do so. Using gender-neutral language can help to make people of all genders feel included.
- Attendees should be called to speak in the order that their hands were raised. However, those who have not spoken as much during the meeting should be prioritised – as attendees speak, the chair or a member of staff can keep a tally to aid this. Consider calling women to speak first on an item, as this may encourage greater participation from other women in the meeting.
- In a virtual meeting, those calling into the meeting by phone should be invited to contribute to the discussion if they are unable to type RTS (request to speak) or raise their hand.
- As it may be difficult for those with visual impairments to read the chat alongside any presentations or on-screen speakers, the chair should verbally share comments from the chat bar, as appropriate. Please also encourage attendees to turn on live captions if helpful.
- Encourage active chairing throughout the meeting. The chair should state the aims of discussions and key asks for each section – making clear the expectations for how attendees should contribute. Chairs should also summarise key points of the discussion at the end of each section.
- If the meeting overruns, the chair should check whether participants are able to continue or consider reducing breaks. If possible, please seek input from attendees using an anonymous platform such as [slido](#). If the meeting has to end, advise that attendees continue discussions through an email thread or listserver, or agree to arrange a follow-up meeting.
- 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, following up with attendees that demonstrate inappropriate behaviour and deescalating when necessary. Please familiarise yourself with the BMA's behaviour principles to avoid such scenarios.

Ensuring representation within committees

Part of having an inclusive meeting is ensuring that there is diversity and inclusion amongst those attending the meeting. To ensure representation within committees:

- promote upcoming elections on platforms that will be seen by more grassroots members and under-represented groups such as women and ethnic minority members, including social media, BMA elected member networks, and external organisations that represent under-represented groups
- promote resources and support that are available to elected members such as the [BMA family friendly fund, culture and inclusion courses](#), the [committee speak up guardian](#), and the [committee mentoring programme](#)
- inform members of the elected member networks [BMA national FREE](#), [Network of Elected Women](#) and the [BMA DLN network](#)
- elect an equality champion for your committee – the role of the champion is to act as a point of contact and advocacy for branch of practice-specific or pan-BMA equality issues
- request a committee equality monitoring report annually to better understand the make-up of our democratic structures and improve the representativeness of our committees.

To further discuss what your committee could be doing to be more inclusive and representative, please contact the corporate EDI team (corporate.edi@bma.org.uk).

Voting on motions/decisions within a meeting

In meetings where voting takes place on a motion or decision the process should be agreed upon by the chair and relevant staff members ahead of the meeting – please note that an electronic voting process will likely take place. If possible, attendees should also be made aware of this process in advance.

During meetings, it is important to ensure that as many participants as possible have had the chance to contribute prior to moving to a vote. The process for voting (agreed prior to the meeting) will be shared with participants before voting commences, for instance:

- Virtual, in-person or hybrid meetings may use an online platform (eg slido) for participants to submit their vote;
- In a roll-call vote, each member may be asked to vote via an online platform, but must be informed in advance that how they voted will be recorded in the meeting minutes;
- In a secret vote, members may be asked to vote via an online platform and the total number of votes will be shared.

Please note that member elections for a role (eg election to a committee) involve a separate process that is conducted through the online BMA elections system. Learn more about BMA committee elections [here](#).

For more advice on chairing a meeting, please consult the [BMA chairing a meeting guidance](#) on this.

Housekeeping guidance for the chair to share at the beginning of the meeting:

- Inform attendees if the meeting is being recorded and what the recording will be used for.
- Let attendees know the designated contact for the meeting in case they experience any technical difficulties.
- Inform attendees if there are any scheduled breaks and what time they have been scheduled for.
- Participants should mute their microphones when not speaking, this also applies to the meeting chair.
- Live captions can be enabled in Teams so that real-time captions will appear on an individual's screen. It can be turned on by clicking 'More actions' which is shown by three dots (...), then scroll down and select 'Turn on live captions'. (Read more about this function [here](#).)
- If an attendee joins the meeting remotely while driving, please advise them to disconnect the call as it is not safe and possibly illegal.
- Explain how questions or comments will be moderated - if participants wish to speak, they can indicate this by typing RTS (Request to Speak) in the chat function or by clicking on 'Raise hand' within Teams.
- Encourage attendees to use their webcams when they speak, as it is particularly helpful for those who lipread, however personal preferences are respected if participants are not comfortable being on camera.
- Advise attendees to be mindful of other participants' accessibility needs and there may be some attendees who need longer to process information.

Hybrid meetings

- Ask that all in-person attendees bring a device and headphones (with a functioning microphone) to join the virtual meeting. This way, remote attendees can more easily see and hear all attendees, including those attending in-person. Please note that all face-to-face attendees may need to mute their laptops so not to feedback with the room's microphone.
- Ensure the chair welcomes any participants joining remotely and alternates between face-to-face and remote attendees when taking contributions. Where possible, remote attendees can be asked to lead agenda items.
- Encourage all attendees to speak clearly when contributing and to use adequately lit spaces, avoiding backgrounds that are too 'busy', so that those with visual or auditory impairments can better understand them, such as through lipreading.

After meetings

- Where appropriate, encourage discussion of agenda items on the listserver to be inclusive of those who were unable to attend the meeting.
- Feedback should be sought after each meeting to improve the running of future meetings (e.g. 'What is your overall assessment of the meeting?' 1 = inadequate to 5 = excellent, 'Which topics or aspects of the meeting did you find most interesting or useful?').
- Aim to finalise and send out the minutes to attendees as soon as possible after the meeting has taken place.
- Ensure action points are well articulated in the minutes so that people's responsibilities are clear.
- Always ensure attendees have the option to provide amendments to the minutes if they feel there are inaccuracies.
- Consider giving regular progress updates and clear timescales for action points.

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

Accessibility in BMA House

- A quiet room is available for use in BMA House on the basement level by the Dickens room.
- Baby-changing and feeding facilities are available in the medical room, located on the basement level by the Dickens room. To access this room, please ask for the key at reception.
- For more information, please see the '[BMA House](#)' section of our website for details on accessing spaces.

For information on the offices in the devolved nations, please contact the relevant office using the contact details below:

Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9026 9666

Email: BMANorthernIreland@bma.org.uk

Scotland

Tel: 0131 247 3000

Email: BMAScotland@bma.org.uk

Wales

Tel: 029 2047 4646

Email: BMAWales@bma.org.uk

Additional resources

Support and resources for inclusive meetings

- The BMA's [code of conduct](#) sets out the standards of behaviour that support our values in the work that we do. BMA staff members' first point of contact for raising concerns about member behaviour is the BMA Code of Conduct support line. The support line is a free, independent and external service that provides support and guidance to BMA members and staff in order to help them deal with their concerns and the impact of behaviours exhibited by BMA members, and to discuss possible resolutions.

The support line is staffed by accredited counsellors from 9am to 8pm on Monday to Friday, and from 10am to 6pm on Saturday. The contact number for the support line is 0800 028 2092.

Information on further ways to raise concerns can be found in the [BMA quick guide to raising concerns about member behaviour](#).

- The BMA offers a range of confidential and free [wellbeing support services](#) to doctors and medical students.
- Elected members can benefit from training and support programmes, such as the [mentoring programme](#), the [leadership programme](#) and our [online equality, diversity and inclusion modules](#). These programmes are designed to support elected members in their medico-political work and help them effect positive change at the association.
- [Etiquette guidance for online meetings](#) created by BMA technology services.
- [BMA care guidelines for members with caring responsibilities for children or dependants](#).
- PEEP (personal emergency egress plan) form [for staff and contractors](#) and [for visitors](#).
- Member guides for accessing meetings using [Microsoft Teams](#).
- [BMA House accessibility guide](#) for further information
- Nameplates are available for meetings which can remind participants of the BMA's behaviour principles:

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



- The BMA behaviour principles and PARK it tool are included in the standard meeting agenda template – these can help to guide people to behave in ways which make meetings inclusive:

Respect others

Professional – Is this how a doctor should behave?

Accountable – Would I stand by my action in front of my fellow committee members?
In public?

Representative – Am I representing the views of my constituents rather than my own personal opinions?

Kind – Would I behave like this towards a family member or friend?

If in doubt, PARK it!