<u>Meeting Arrangements Workstream</u>

<u>Access Survey Results</u>

In previous surveys, all audiences said **Time** was the key barrier to participation **(75%).** The overwhelming evidence was that to make meetings more accessible, and people wanted to see more virtual meetings in future. They liked the changes to accommodate these, including more structured and purposeful meetings encompassing shorter, timed agendas and regular breaks. Additionally, all audiences supported much greater use of virtual time-limited meetings **(66%).**

As a result, the Working Group agreed the following recommendations:

Recommendation 2. The Regional Access Standards for virtual meetings are incorporated into the Regional Constitution and will apply to all regional meetings.

In order to carry out recommendation two, it was necessary to review the current Access Standards and the Virtual Meetings Access Standards to review what had worked and consider what else could be included.

We wrote to all current members on regional committees that identified as disabled, asking to hear their views on the current 'Regional Access Standards' that we have in place for virtual and physical meetings and on which elements are the most important to keep for future meetings in the region.

Additionally, a discussion took place at the Regional Disabled Members Committee to capture their views and any suggested changes.
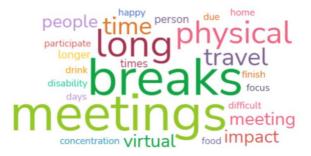
<u>Results</u>

Participants were asked how important they felt different measures were for them to be able to fully participate:

- **66%** Response rate to the survey
- **93%** said knowing the meeting date and time at least 4 weeks in advance was **Important, with 65% stating very important**
- **91% said** receiving papers and/or presentations 2 weeks in advance was **Important**
- **91%** said having access to the right IT equipment to take part in virtual meetings was **Important**, with **82%** stating **very important**
- **79%** said having the opportunity to learn how to use the virtual meeting platform in advance or at the start of the meeting was **Important**
- **54%** said knowing there won't be anything unexpected on the agenda was **Important**, with **33%** stating **very important** and additionally 24.2% stating **neutral**.

It is clear from the results that having more advance notice, fewer changes to meeting dates and times and paperwork in advance better supports disabled members in making the practical arrangements necessary to attend meetings, process the content of paperwork, and have the time to fully prepare for the meeting.

- **100%** said knowing the start and finish time of a meeting was **important**, with **73%** stating **very important**
- **91%** said knowing there will be a break at a certain time and how long it will last is **Important**, with 75% stating **very important**
- **69%** said having a timed agenda, so I know what will happen when is **importan**t, with **18% neutral**
- **66%** said virtual meetings should last 2 hours or less, with **24%** stating **1.5 hours or less**
- Only **15%** of respondents stated that meetings being limited to an hour and a half and finishing on time has **negatively** impacted their ability to participate
- Respondents were asked how physical meetings that did not previously have a timed agenda and lasted for one to five hours, occasionally going over their finishing time, impacted on their ability to participate:

Of these responses,
- **18%** reported that there had been no impact on their ability to participate.
- **30%** reported that the timing of the meetings negatively impacted their ability to participate, including the length of meetings and lack of timed agenda.
- **37%** reported that lack of breaks, untimed/planned breaks or not enough breaks negatively impacted their ability to participate. This included being unable to plan food or medication requirements and unable to plan for mitigating physical discomfort or unease.
- **41%** reported that physical meetings themselves impacted their ability to participate. This included difficulty travelling, particularly if meetings overran into peak travel or had to leave early to travel off-peak missing part of the meeting, as well as difficulties hearing or concentrating in physical meetings.
- **51%** said physical meetings should last **three hours or less**, with **39%** stating they should last **two hours or less**.

It's clear from the results that meetings and events, whether virtual or physical, can be tiring for participants, especially for some disabled members. Others may need to take medication, eat or have regular breaks from sitting or looking at a display screen. They should be able to do so without missing any part of the meeting or being unable to fully participate. Having timed agendas with strict breaks and end times supports disabled members in participating in both virtual and physical meetings. It allows them to be able to plan their attendance and travel as well as meet their needs during meetings.

- **84%** said being able to request reasonable adjustments through the access passport was **important**
- **78%** said knowing a dedicated person is always available to help if they have an issue was **important**
- **84%** said knowing how to contribute to a meeting (eg. by raising your hand) and when you will be able to contribute was **important**
- **68%** said being able to participate without being interrupted - either verbally or through use of the chat function was **important**, with only **20%** stating that knowing the chat function was not part of the meeting was **unimportant**
- **63%** said that being able to see everybody's faces in a virtual meeting was **important**
- **66%** said that everyone arriving on time and staying until the end of a meeting was **important**
- **66%** said that everyone using a plain, neutral background in a virtual meeting was **unimportant or neutral**
- **90%** said everyone muting their microphones when not speaking was **important**
- **59%** said having the option of closed captions in a meeting was **important**
- **35%** said having the option of a BSL interpreter in a meeting was **important**, with **58% neutral**.

From the results, it is clear that every disabled member has different needs to participate fully. we must do everything we can to facilitate these needs. This includes being able to ask questions, be part of a debate and process information or contributions from others before deciding policy or voting. Particularly for neurodiverse members, reducing distractions helps them to focus and participate. This includes what is happening on screen. For dyslexic members or those with mobility issues, members may face a barrier in using their keyboard or mouse. Some members may have non-apparent impairments or may not wish to disclose them publicly.

- **72%** felt that their contributions were welcomed and valued
- **67%** felt everyone has an equal opportunity to speak

- **81%** felt appropriate language is being used - that there is no swearing, discriminatory language or jargon that they are not familiar with
- **78%** felt that everyone shows respect for one another

From the results, it is clear that our Regional Access Standards help ensure that UNISON meetings are inclusive to all members; they help everyone to feel welcome to contribute in an open and supportive environment, particularly those who may feel excluded in their workplace or wider society.

Additional Ideas for ensuring inclusive virtual & physical meetings:

The summary of ideas and suggestions below arose through discussions at relevant regional meetings and through the comments boxes on the survey:

- When creating model paperwork, ensuring that this is accessible and compliant with expert, tested guidance.
- Guidance for Chairs to invite contributions from those that ' have not previously spoken in the debate
- Limiting speaking times and frequency of contributions
- Additional breaks, adjusting the meeting times to accommodate these, for both physical & virtual meetings
- Shorter breaks for shorter meetings
- Guidance for those using phones on how to angle the camera
- Support for branches in ensuring everyone has access to the right equipment
- Co-Chairs or Committee Secretaries designated to monitor the hands up or those indicating to speak to help with inclusive chairing (i.e who speaks next) as it can be difficult for the Chair to watch the agenda, Chair the meeting and ensure inclusive speakers.
- Further exploration of Hybrid meeting options for meetings that have to be held physically to support those that cannot travel
- Ability to request larger font documents easily i.e when sent as a PDF
- Those using dictation software cannot use the chat function, so advice on how to ask for help
- Limiting background noise in physical meetings, particularly more discipline on side conversations
- Physical meetings can make disabilities/adjustments more apparent; virtual can offer a more level playing field
- Arrange two physical meetings on the same day i.e – Regional Council in AM and Service Group meeting in PM to cut down on unnecessary travel
- Accessible venues checklist- i.e disabled parking, close to a train station
- Times for physical meetings to take into consideration off-peak travel for all attendees i.e not just those closest to London
- Greater notice for physical meetings

- Larger meeting rooms to increase space between chairs- both for COVID reasons and to accommodate those with larger chairs
- Designated seats and priority seats nearer to the front of meetings for partially sighted or semi-blind attendees