UNISON is committed to removing or reducing all barriers to participation. The South East Region has led the way in this through our Working Together Guidelines, Virtual Access Standards and Disability Access Passport. It's vitally important that we continue to ensure all our meetings and events are accessible to all members and everyone can participate fully.

The following access standards are based on the national criteria for holding meetings, the national guide to open accessible meetings and the best practice developed during the pandemic.

These must be used for all UNISON South East meetings and events with members, and our Working Together Guidelines will continue to apply.

Definitions
The region will facilitate three styles of meeting or event.

- In-person: where all participants attend in person.
- Virtual: where all participants attend online (using Microsoft Teams)
- Hybrid: where some participants attend in person, and some attend online.

Approach to planning meetings

- Committee Secretaries and Chairs should work together to schedule the normal number of committee meetings according to their constitution, normally planning a year in advance.
- The plan should specify which meetings will be hybrid, virtual, or in-person.
- Activists have limited time and meeting agendas should be business focused.
- Given the difficulties meeting during the Covid pandemic, and the continuing demands being placed on frontline workers, especially Health and Social Care workers, consideration should be given to delaying meetings or decisions that are not time critical.
- Meetings will not begin unless they are quorate. If ten minutes after the published start time the meeting is still not quorate, the meeting will be closed.
- Hybrid and online meetings must use Microsoft Teams.
- Until further notice, the only venue which can be used for hybrid meetings is UNISON Centre.

Before your meeting or event

- Meeting invitations will be sent to all committee members four weeks prior to the meeting date. The invitation will specify whether a meeting will be hybrid, virtual, or in-person only.
- Officers of the committee need to check that all committee members, have an equal opportunity to access the meeting. Firstly, by checking that they have

the necessary IT equipment to participate and secondly, that they are not performing vital, frontline roles. If committee members do not have an equal opportunity to participate, the meeting cannot go ahead.

- Ensure you allow enough notice, at least four weeks, to arrange any reasonable adjustments required, such as BSL interpreters, and for attendees to secure facility time.
- Attending a meeting or event virtually can be more tiring, so consider carefully how long your meeting or event needs to last; they should only last as long as necessary to carry out core business discussions. Agendas must be timed and adhered to. The template agenda must be used.
- The expectation is that most meetings can be completed between one hour and ninety minutes. In exceptional circumstances, a meeting can be planned to last up to two hours.
- Two hours is the maximum length any meeting can last.
- If a meeting needs to continue for more than one hour, a break must be included.
- All attendees should be asked what adjustments they need in the joining instructions for the meeting with reference made to the region's Access Passport.
- Do not assume members don't need adjustments - they may have non-apparent impairments. The meeting can only go ahead once it's been confirmed that these have reasonably been met.
- Do not assume adjustments will be the same for hybrid, virtual or in-person meetings. Members may have different access requirements depending on how they are attending the meeting.
- Circulate any papers and slides two weeks before the meeting so that members with different requirements have time to read and process the contents.
- Clear instructions must be sent in advance regarding how to access the virtual platform and make clear how the meeting will be run and what functions of the software you will be using.
- If your meeting includes facilitating contributions or questions from attendees, this must be done in an accessible way and let members know in advance through clear indications on the agenda. It may be helpful to allow members a choice of ways of requesting to speak, such as "hand up" and chat functions or text message.
- Test any accessibility options and adjustments you will be using in advance to ensure they work and consider setting up a test session with the individual members requesting adjustments.
- Committee officers – Chair, Secretary, Administrator, Technical and Access Facilitator – must all have received appropriate training in how to deliver a virtual or a hybrid meeting if the meeting is to take place in that style.
- The Technical and Access Facilitator is responsible for the Teams meeting settings. Settings will be the same for virtual and hybrid meetings (eg, the waiting room will be enabled).

Hybrid meetings

Members attending a hybrid meeting either in-person or online must have an equitable experience and have equal opportunity and ability to participate. Hybrid

meetings will be designed for all attendees. UNISON South East will ensure that those attending online have a first-class experience.

- Committee members must rsvp for hybrid meetings when they receive the calling notice (four weeks prior to the meeting) and indicate whether they will attend online or in-person.
- If a majority of those attending indicate a preference for attending the hybrid meeting online, then the meeting will be switched to a virtual meeting. Any change to the meeting arrangement will be communicated when papers are circulated (2 weeks prior).
- The chair, secretary, and administrator of a committee will normally be expected to attend a hybrid meeting in-person.
- The technical and access facilitator will normally attend online.
- Members attending online must be able to view all participants that are attending in person (ie, the camera position must show all participants).
- The maximum number of people attending in-person for a hybrid meeting to go ahead with a single camera is 15.
- For any meeting with more than 15 people attending in-person, additional technical support must be sought, with multiple microphones and cameras recommended. Alternatively, the meeting will be switched to a virtual or an in-person only meeting.
- Hybrid equipped meeting rooms must have sufficient microphones to allow all participants attending to be heard by those attending online.
- The chair will normally have access to a laptop/screen so they can see hands raised both in the room, and from virtual participants. The microphone on this laptop/screen should be muted and the speakers also muted so as not to interfere with the audio equipment in the meeting room.
- Members attending online will be encouraged to 'pin' the window viewing the in-person meeting room so that it appears larger on their screen than other windows. This will assist with lip syncing and viewing who is speaking.
- All participants, online and in-person, will be encouraged to state who they are before making any verbal contribution.
- The TA Facilitator may share a list of names of those attending the meeting in-person in the online meeting chat, so that people attending online know who is in the physical room.

Members attending meeting online (Hybrid or Virtual meeting)

Speakers, especially the Chair, and all contributors, should be advised of the following in advance of the meeting:

- Make sure your face is well-lit and can be clearly seen so that members with visual impairments or who lip read can see you.
- Position your webcam roughly in line with your eyes and back it up a little so that there is space around your face and upper body.
- Be aware that light coming from behind you can shadow your face and can be painful for people with a visual impairment. Do not sit in front of a window – if you must then close the blinds or curtains.
- Use a headset or earphones where possible to improve audio quality.

- Choose the option "blur background" in Teams or if available on similar platforms to reduce distraction and allow a clearer image so that neurodiverse members and those with hearing impairments can focus on what you are saying.
- Provide any slides or papers you will be using two weeks in advance so that members with different impairments have time to read and process the contents.
- Slow down your speaking style and create pauses between sections so members who are taking notes, using live captions or sign language interpreters can catch up.
- If you are using the shared screen function in Teams, remember that not everyone can see what you're referring to. Describe what is on the screen and send presentations or documents in advance.
- The online chat function within Teams should only be used to raise technical and access issues with the TA Facilitator, (the exception to this being if it is being used as a reasonable adjustment).

During the meeting (Virtual and Hybrid)

- There will be a "technical and access facilitator" in the meeting to deal with any access issues during the meeting and ensure everyone can participate.
- The technical and access facilitator can use the function "mute all" and ask attendees to mute themselves when not speaking to avoid feedback and distracting background noise that can affect members with hearing impairments.
- There will be a chairs checklist for each style of meeting and chairs should cover the checklist at the start of the meeting.
- Attendees should not speak unless called upon by the Chair; this includes responses back.
- If attendees are called away from their screen, or there are any distractions in the background, cameras should be switched off so neurodiverse members can focus.
- Ask people speaking to say their name every time they speak, so all attendees know who is talking.
- If you are using the chat function, be aware that some members may face barriers in using their keyboard or mouse, might have dyslexia or their first language might be BSL rather than English.
- The chat function should be used to raise technical and access issues with the TA facilitator. Contributions to the meeting should be made verbally after being called on by the Chair.
- The agenda will be timed and should include when questions or comments are taken on each appropriate agenda item, with timings for this to allow attendees to prepare and have time to input their questions.
- Opportunity should be given to submit questions in advance where possible.
- The Chair should ensure that a wide variety of attendees are called upon to ask questions, this is particularly important as agendas will be timed. Those who have not yet contributed should be called upon first to ensure everyone has a chance to engage in the discussions.
- Ensure the meeting finishes on time so that members who need to eat or take medication, or have caring responsibilities, are not adversely affected.

- Notes of meetings must be taken by the committee administrator and circulated to everyone, including those not in attendance.
- The Technical and Access Facilitator must have a way to contact the other committee officers (Chair, Secretary, Administrator) during the meeting.

Voting
- Elections, no matter the meeting style, will always be taken by a secret ballot.
- All other votes during in-person meetings will normally be taken by participants raising their hands.
- Votes in virtual meetings can use a variety of methods depending on the circumstances. The Chair and Secretary should agree in advance the approach to all votes required in the meeting and work with the administrator and TA Facilitator to deliver this. This may include:
  - the raised hands feature in Teams
  - Using Teams polling
  - Using Alchemer survey software
- Votes in Hybrid meetings will normally be taken by in-person participants raising their physical hand, and online attendees raising their Teams virtual hand, at the same time. The chair will then combine the votes.
- Arrangements must be made for any members unable to access the voting system. For example, those dialling in on a telephone conference basis must have their votes recorded separately and added to the count. This could be achieved using email.
- Where committee officers believe a vote during a virtual or hybrid may be particularly close, and if it can reasonably take place after the meeting, then it is recommended that it is conducted via an email to all committee members, with a clear deadline (usually one week) to ensure a robust democratic process. The normal quoracy rules will apply for these votes and committee members must be informed of the result after votes close.
- The region believes that ideally the same experience of voting would be used for people attending both in-person and online. We will investigate a new voting solution which could be used across all meeting styles and provide clear and robust results during the meeting.

Guidance on Reasonable Adjustments (Hybrid and Virtual meetings)

Captioning

- If a member has requested speech to text, Microsoft Teams includes the option of live captioning.
- You should advise any members requiring captioning or speech to text that they can switch on this option by clicking the three dots on the control dashboard and selecting 'turn on live captions'.

British Sign Language

- If a member has requested British Sign Language interpretation, we recommend you use a BSL interpreter from Interpreting Matters (office@interpretingmatters.co.uk)

- If using Teams, you should advise the member to "pin" the interpreter to their screen so they can see them at all times.
- The BSL interpreter will also need to "pin" the Deaf member to their screen.
- The interpreter will need to join the meeting in advance of the start time to set up. BSL interpreters should be registered with a national body such as NRCPD (www.nrcpd.org.uk) or RBSLI (www.rbsli.org). It is not appropriate to use trainee interpreters, family members or work colleagues who can use BSL but are not qualified interpreters.
- Sometimes more than one interpreter is needed depending on the length and complexity of a meeting – interpreters need breaks too!

Paperwork

- Please be aware that the region cannot currently send out any hardcopy paperwork from our offices.
- Where Branch offices are open, Branches should be asked to support their respective committee members who require hard copy papers.
- Where Branch offices are closed, committee members must notify the region, who can then arrange for an external printer/postage company to undertake this task. The cost of this will be paid for by the facilitation budget head from the Regional Council budget.
- All paperwork must, therefore, be received in a format that can be accessed on any IT equipment and received at least two weeks in advance.
- No additional papers or presentations can be referenced or used during meetings.