

University of Reading

Guidance for the Conduct of Meetings in 2021/22

Welcome to the University of Reading guide for conducting meetings during the 2021/22 academic year. For the Autumn Term, it has been agreed that [Calendared meetings](#) (and similar types of meeting (size/formality eg working and project groups) will continue to be held virtually by default. This is to allow space to be prioritised for teaching and research activities. The policy will be reviewed during the Autumn Term.

However, circumstances may arise where it is necessary for the enhancement of business success and/or staff wellbeing for a physical meeting to take place. There is currently very limited capacity on campus to facilitate mixed mode or hybrid meetings and as such hybrid meetings should only take place if they can be held in a manner to allow effective participation by all those attending whether in person or remotely.

In this Guidance you will find information relating to the various modes of meeting

- [Hybrid meetings](#)
- [In person](#)
- [Teams](#),

and signposts to further [Guidance for Committee Meetings](#). There is also some [suggested text](#) to be included with meeting invitations for in person meetings at the end of this Guidance

We recognise that many colleagues will need to be focused on delivering teaching and learning, and supporting students. Chairs and secretaries should consider whether holding that meeting is necessary, or whether it could either be cancelled or postponed, and any urgent business conducted satisfactorily by another means such as e-mail.

We hope that this guide will help you in managing and participating in meetings.

HYBRID MEETINGS

There are currently only a very limited number of rooms on campus that have the full equipment in situ to facilitate these types of meeting, although small hybrid meetings may be held using portable equipment.

Hybrid meetings should only take place if it is possible to allow effective participation by all those attending whether in person or remote.

This does not prevent small ad hoc meetings where someone is asked to join the meeting via Teams or using other portable technology.

You should specifically check in advance what capability the room has. Many rooms do not currently have cameras or microphones. If in doubt you should contact the DTS Service Desk to clarify in advance.

If a hybrid meeting is to take place, you should:

- Ensure that you are familiar with organising a Teams meeting
- Ensure that the room is equipped to facilitate a hybrid meeting AND that you understand and are able to operate the equipment. There may be limited DTS support available.
- If you are using portable equipment, ensure that you are familiar with its operation

IN PERSON MEETINGS

Before the Meeting

If you are considering holding a meeting in person you should consider

- i) **why** it is necessary to hold the meeting in this manner and
- ii) **how** will you risk assess to ensure it is Covid secure

It may be reasonable to hold meetings in-person to

- Consider sensitive or challenging discussions which need to be in-person (such as staff or student wellbeing, or managing poor performance, etc)
- Maintain confidentiality not provided by either at-home working or from an open plan or multi occupancy office situation
- Review extensive or detailed written resources or documents that don't reproduce well on screen (eg detailed financial accounts, maps or printed publicity materials, etc)
- Enable creative and interactive engagement that can be most effectively facilitated by meeting in person,
- Where it is necessary to take tour premises or the campus together, to physically observe an issue and then discuss it

Any meeting being held in person should be risk assessed. For small informal meetings this could be a dynamic risk assessment (checking room capacity/opening windows etc). For larger formal meetings when they are able to take place, this will include a more detailed risk assessment. The [revised generic risk assessment for meetings](#) should be used.

Meetings in person should be a collective decision of the Chair and meeting members. This will always be subject to room availability and any decision of the MRT on maximum numbers permitted. In deciding on holding an in person meeting, you should take into account the requirements of any attendees with a disability who maybe attending the meeting and ensure that the meeting can be conducted in an inclusive manner for everyone attending the meeting in any form.

Any in person meeting will need to adhere any restrictions that remain in place at the time of the meeting.

You should also refer to the [Good Practice Guide to Committee Servicing](#) available on the Governance Zone

When holding an in-person meeting, you will need to:-

- Book a suitable space for the meeting that:
 - o is of sufficient size to maintain social distancing taking account of reduced room occupancies; and if possible
 - o has the necessary equipment to enable the meeting to be attended by attendees unable to attend in person.
- Read the [Meeting Room Generic Risk Assessment](#) in advance and determine whether any additional control measures are required for the room you have booked or the activity planned
- Take account of the requirements of any attendees with a disability who maybe attending the meeting and ensure that the meeting can be conducted in an inclusive manner for everyone attending the meeting in any form.

- In all cases, when sending out invites to the Meeting you should include a Teams Meeting link (as a reserve) but make it very clear that the meeting will be in person and whether or not there will be an ability to join remotely
- When sending out invites to a larger formal meeting and when issuing papers, meeting organisers should send out a copy of the [Meeting Room Generic Risk Assessment](#) as well as any additional instructions the meeting space may require. [Text for inclusion in the Meeting invite and paper issue is included at the end of this Guidance](#)

During the Meeting

If you are attending a meeting in person, a good rule of thumb is to always assume when you walk into the room that the microphones are already live to other locations! This will help prevent any extraneous pre-meeting conversation from being broadcast when you might not intend it to.

Where meetings are mixed physical (face to face) and virtual (online) it is appropriate for the Chair to ask online participants to speak first.

Chairs – it will be important to engage remote participants, don't forget they are there if the meeting is a mixed model meeting. Asking questions frequently can help both to engage and to keep a personal connection going. Try to be explicit in your questions. Ask a specific person a specific question. Asking open-ended questions to a large remote audience will often result in "dead air" and then multiple people talking at once.

In addition to the Guidance above, the following **MUST** be adhered where the meeting has any in person element:

Refreshments

Current advice (SN76) is that eating or drinking can create aerosols and these activities should be discouraged in shared spaces. As a general rule, participants should not eat or drink during an in-person meeting save for for medical reasons or reasons of discomfort

If the meeting is long, Chairs should remember to include breaks in the meeting to allow people to step outside for refreshment. Please bear in mind and make allowances for participants with metabolic conditions (eg diabetes) or mobility disabilities which makes going outside more difficult.

Please also remember that leaving the meeting may clash with other users exiting rooms in the building at busy times

The meeting **MUST** finish 10 minutes before the stated end time to allow for a safe and managed exit and avoid clashes with any subsequent room occupants. (see [Meeting Room Generic Risk Assessment](#))

TEAMS MEETINGS

Before setting up any Teams Meeting you should read the guidance that can be found using the following link – Communicating with Teams

<https://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/its/phones/communicating-with-teams.aspx> which provides all users with important information relating to Microsoft Teams. In particular you should read the guidance- **Guidelines for using Microsoft Teams** which includes privacy information for all users regarding call recording, details of specific matters that are not permitted to be recorded, and

etiquette for chat and calls. Further information on recording of meetings can be found at <http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/DataProtection/imps-dp-data-protection-recording.aspx>

Setting up a Meeting

- Set up your meeting in Outlook in the usual way. If you need help to do this, please refer to <https://www.reading.ac.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=143209&sID=491321>
Meetings will be held using Microsoft Teams. On the task bar at the top of your screen you should have a “New Teams Meeting” button. Click this to add a link to your meeting invite. If you have anyone joining the meeting who is likely to join by phone, you will need to ensure that the meeting link includes a phone number and ID
- If you have external participants, please ensure that they know how to join a virtual meeting either by phone or online. If participants don’t have Teams they can connect using a web browser (by clicking on the link in the meeting request) or by calling the phone number in the meeting request (this is **not** a free phone number).

Before the Meeting

- Please test equipment and connectivity prior to the meeting.
- To participate in a meeting, you need a microphone and speakers/earphones or a headset.
- Headphones with a microphone can be used (if you have them) and may make the call easier to manage with less background noise. If you don’t have a headset, please mute your microphone unless you are actually speaking.
- Using the video function so that other participants can see you does help with engagement, but consider how good your internet connection is – you may need to turn off the video to improve sound quality at points during any digital meeting.
- If using video remember to turn on your PC camera and microphone and position your camera so that you can be seen properly and not silhouetted against a bright light. Please be aware that striped clothing and large jewellery can interfere with the picture quality. Consider what could be seen in the background – you may wish to use the ‘blur background’ function. Try to keep your body movements to a minimum as excessive movement can degrade video quality
- Mute other devices and close/mute any applications that might distract you or others in the meeting (beeps from emails arriving can be distracting for others).

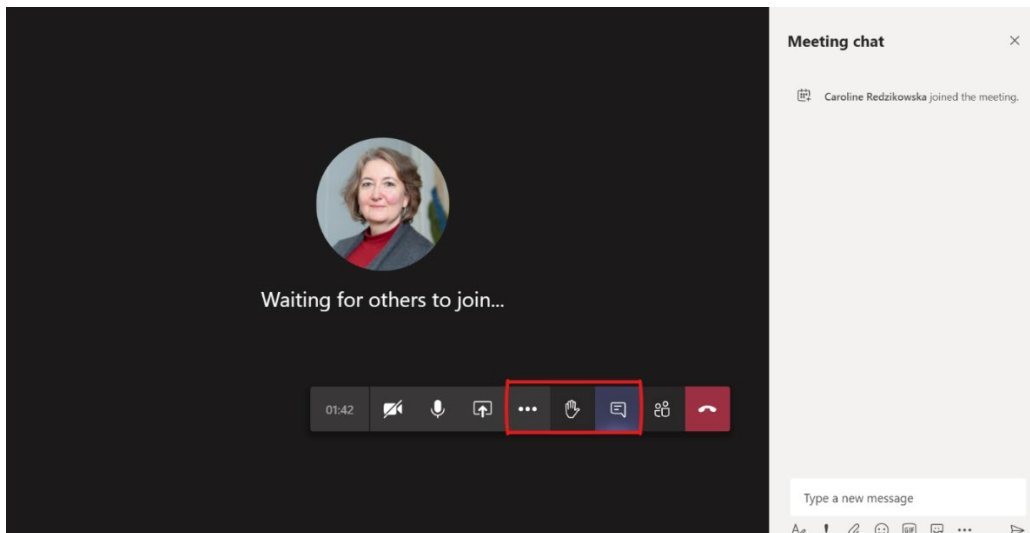
Starting the Meeting

- Where possible join the meeting at least 5 minutes before the scheduled meeting time to ensure connectivity, enable a register of attendees to be taken and a prompt start and to avoid disrupting other members while you enter. If you arrive late for whatever reason, please make yourself known in the chat function or by raising your hand
- To join the meeting, simply select the meeting link provided in the calendar invitation. Then:
 - Connect your headset/earphones (if applicable)
 - Test your settings (5+ minutes before the meeting is due to start)
 - **Enable video** and check your camera angle.
 - Click on the three dots in the middle of the screen and select 'show device settings'
 - **Check your speaker volume**
 - **Check your microphone** (select the little symbol to unmute, speak to test, and re-mute)
 - Mute your microphone
 - Select ‘join’ - you have now joined the meeting.

- The meeting will not start until the Chair is in attendance and the meeting is quorate (if necessary).
- When joining the meeting, assume that cameras will be on; meetings are much more personal that way. NB: It may be necessary (especially in larger meetings) for everyone to turn their video off in order to improve connectivity.
- Unless this meeting has been run before and everyone understands already, the Chair should make clear how raising hands and/or chat will be used. In a small meeting, it may be decided that neither needs to be used. If chat is to be used, it is important that it does not become its own separate meeting. The Chair and Secretary may decide in large or complex meetings to ask one of the members to monitor the chat and bring to their attention any matters of note.

Conducting the Meeting

- The role of the Chair is critical to maintain order, to make sure everyone is involved and has a chance to speak. Please remember that whilst many of us are now familiar with the new meeting arrangement and the technology involved, this may not be true for everyone, especially for external participants.
- If meeting for the first time, or if the meeting is occasional, take time for everyone to make introductions so that everyone knows who is on the call (unless there is a large number of participants).
- If you are leading a larger meeting, you may need to ask participants to turn off their video if the quality of connectivity becomes an issue.
- Video-conference meetings should move at a slightly slower pace than a typical meeting due to a two to three second delay for most systems to communicate. If you're leading the meeting, make sure there are sufficient pauses after asking a question
- It is advisable to allow regular breaks during longer meetings – virtual meetings tend to be more tiring for participants. It is strongly recommended that meetings finish 10 minutes **before** the stated end time to allow participants a short break before the next meeting.
- Regardless of where you are, remember that you are in a meeting. Give your full attention to the participants as you would if you were in the same room. Avoid being distracted by e-mail, Web surfing, or texting.
- All presenters need to ensure that it is clear what agenda item and/or page is under discussion.
- Please speak a little more slowly to ensure that everyone can hear.
- Please do not interrupt or speak over people. If you wish to 'come in' on discussion, please use the 'raise your hand' or 'Chat' functions.



- To bring up the “meeting chat” or “raise your hand” functions, use the buttons indicated in red (above). Bear in mind that everyone participating will be able to see your comment in Chat, unless you send it as a private message. If using the raise your hand function, wait to be invited to speak by the Chair. Don’t forget to lower your hand once you have spoken (just click the hand symbol again)
- Other members have the option to click a small thumbs up icon to the right of the comment if they “like” it. This is particularly useful if you were going to ask the same question.
- The Chair will address someone by name if they wish to invite them to respond so that all members are sure who needs to answer.
- Remember to mute your phone/microphone when not speaking, particularly if you are in a noisy area or using your keyboard – “noises off” can be very distracting and can make it difficult for other people in the meeting to hear clearly.
- It is suggested that participants should also make eye contact by looking into the camera, as it makes conversation among the participants appear more natural.

To summarise:

- Do speak clearly
- Do keep body movements minimal and keep any gestures slow and natural
- Do maintain eye contact by looking into the camera
- Do dress as is appropriate for a business meeting
- Don't interrupt other speakers
- Don't carry on side conversations
- Don't cover the microphone
- You may find it helpful if you haven’t met for a while or have new participants to break the ice by going around the "virtual" room and asking everyone to introduce themselves.

Ending the meeting

- The Chair or Secretary should summarise at the end any actions that have been agreed, responsibilities, and deadlines.
- The Chair will formally end the meeting and you should end the call – remember that until you do so, others may still be able to see and hear you.
- Please remember if you are joining a meeting and there are other people present where you are, it may be appropriate to:

- Blur your background
- Use your headphones and microphone to limit distraction and prevent any confidential discussion from being overheard
- If you are working out of the office or at home, try and find a quiet space to join the meeting. Your colleagues will understand that this is not always possible
- If you are participating in or chairing a meeting and it is clear that colleagues have child-care or other responsibilities, please be understanding and considerate if an occasional “visitor” joins in

Other methods for conducting meetings

Conference calls

Where only a small number of attendees are unable to be physically present, you might be able to conduct a telephone conference call. This can be done via Teams.

Email

Email can be used to cover the whole business of a meeting or to support decision-making.

Meeting business (paperwork) can be emailed to committee members and they can reply to confirm that they approve. Approvals should be monitored on a spreadsheet or similar for auditing purposes.

Comments on items can also be taken by email and ‘for information’ items/presentations can also be circulated by email. However, it would be important to ensure that the minute taker/secretary is copied into any comments on items circulated in this way so that there is an accurate record of those in the meeting minutes record.

Other important ‘good governance’ points to consider

Connectivity

All digital solutions will rely on users having strong broadband or telephone reception. This may not be available to everyone and may prevent some users from participating fully or at all in some cases. If this happens, think in advance about how you could participate, eg emailing comments or questions in advance

In person Meetings- Text to be included with

- Meeting Invite
- Agenda papers
- Any amended invite or updated papers

If you are intending to join the meeting in person, please read the Risk Assessment attached to this [invite/email] BEFORE coming on to campus.

In particular please note the following :

- DO NOT come to campus if you have symptoms of COVID 19
- DO NOT arrive more than 10 minutes before the meeting
- Follow and act on follow all local building signage,

- Minimise lift usage when possible and keep left in corridors unless signed otherwise
- Participants are encouraged to wear appropriate face covering inside buildings particularly in busy common areas when it is not possible to maintain social distancing
- Ensure they have with everything they need for the meeting including pens, meeting papers in electronic form, and where appropriate electronic means of joining the meeting
- Utilise hand sanitiser and wet wipes

During the meeting

- Participants are encouraged to observe social distancing
- If you feel ill or display any symptoms of COVID 19 during the meeting, leave immediately
- No eating, drinking or chewing gum will be permitted during the meeting. If you need to eat or drink for medical reasons or reasons of discomfort, please leave the meeting and go outside where this is possible.
- Please do not raise your voice or shout. If you wish to make yourself heard, please raise a hand
- Remain in your seat and minimise movement around the room
- Do not leave the room during the meeting unless absolutely necessary

When the meeting ends:

- DO NOT remain the room or gather in corridors or spaces near the meeting room
- Please follow guidance signage to exit the building
- Participants are encouraged to wear face coverings when leaving a meeting particularly in busy common areas.
- DO NOT gather outside the building or block entrances

Please remember that some people are exempt from wearing face coverings. This can be for a wide range of reasons, including hidden disabilities.

In general, you will need to have your own face covering and you will be able to purchase them at various outlets on campus. Face coverings can take a variety of forms but should cover the nose and mouth areas. There is helpful advice on using and disposing of face coverings on the [UK government website](#)