**Ensuring accessible virtual meetings and events**

UNISON is committed to the social model of disability and to removing or reducing the barriers disabled people face at work and in society. This includes ensuring all our online meetings are accessible to our disabled members and they are able to participate fully. The following guidance should be used for all virtual meetings and events with members.

**Before your meeting or event**

* Although there is sometimes more flexibility to organise virtual meetings with less notice than face to face meetings where travel is required, ensure you allow enough notice to arrange any reasonable adjustments required, such as BSL interpreters.
* Virtual meetings and events can be more tiring, particularly for some disabled people, so consider carefully how long your meeting or event needs to last.
* If the meeting needs to continue for more than an hour then regular breaks should be included or consider holding the meeting over different days.
* All attendees should be asked what adjustments they need in the joining instructions for the meeting. Do not assume members don’t need adjustments - they may have non-apparent impairments.
* Circulate any papers and slides in good time prior to the meeting so that members with different impairments have time to read and process the contents.
* Send clear instructions 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 interventions or questions from attendees, consider how you can do this in an accessible way and let members know in advance. 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.

**Presenters and Speakers**

Presenters and speakers should be advised of the following in advance of the meeting:

* Make sure your face is well-lit and can be seen clearly 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 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 in good time 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 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

**During the meeting**

* Consider appointing an “accessibility moderator” to deal with any access issues during the meeting.
* Use the function “mute all” or ask attendees to mute themselves when not speaking to avoid feedback and distracting background noise that can affect members with hearing impairments.
* 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. Don’t over-rely on chat functions and allow other ways for members to take part in any discussions.
* Ensure the meeting finishes on time so that members who need to eat or take medication are not adversely affected.

**Captioning**

* If a member has requested speech to text, Microsoft Teams includes the option of automatic 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’.
* If using a different platform, we recommend contacting a professional captioning service, such as [enquiries@cjcaptioning.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@cjcaptioning.co.uk) who provide live captioning for virtual events. If using Zoom, the captions can be embedded, if using a platform such as GoToWebinar the captions will be on a separate URL so attendees may need to either minimise these or use a separate device to view them.

**British Sign Language**

* If a member has requested British Sign Language interpretation, Professional BSL interpreters should be used. They must be registered with a national body such as NRCPD ([www.nrcpd.org.uk](http://www.nrcpd.org.uk)) or RBSLI ([www.rbsli.org](http://www.rbsli.org)). We recommend 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 he start time to set up.
* 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!