**Best Practice Guide to Accessible Hybrid Meetings in UNISON and in the workplace**

**What is a hybrid meeting?**

A hybrid meeting is where some people attend the meeting in-person and are “in the room” while others join virtually, using a computer, from somewhere else. For example, you might have a team meeting with five staff sitting together in a meeting room in the workplace and six team members logging into the meeting from home or other work sites using their computer or smart phone.

If at least one attendee is logging into the meeting remotely then this counts as a hybrid meeting.

**Why is access important?**

People often think that hybrid meetings allow for more participation and inclusion because people can join the meeting remotely even if they are able to travel to the in-person meeting. However, hybrid meetings aren’t always fully accessible for disabled people. The technology used and the set-up of the room may actually make it more difficult for some disabled people to participate. This is why it is so important to consider best practice when setting up hybrid meetings.

**Use the right platform for your attendees**

The first thing to say is that there are no online meeting platforms that are fully accessible as yet. This may change as technology catches up with developments of the last couple of years. However, with the technology we have currently, it is important to understand the limits of each platform and to take action to reduce access issues.

Some platforms are not compatible with screen readers whilst others can crash existing assistive technology. It may not be possible to find a platform that suits everyone but it is important to be flexible, to research and test different platforms and to negotiate work arounds where this is the only option.

**Everyone should be on camera when speaking**

Everyone in the meeting should be able to be on camera when speaking. This is so that their face is fully visible for lip readers, British Sign Language (BSL) speakers and other who need to see a speaker’s face to aid comprehension.

This can be a problem where the technology “in the room” doesn’t include a high-quality camera which moves around the room as people speak. If you are using a laptop or a camera that can’t zoom in on speakers, then those accessing the meeting virtually may not be able to understand speakers in the room.

**Lap top microphones are not good enough**

If you are relying on an internal lap top microphone for sound, it’s unlikely your meeting will be accessible. Those joining virtually will find it very difficult to hear those attending in-person, particularly if virtual attendees have a hearing impairment. Each participant should preferably have access to their own microphone.

**Minimise use of chat function**

Not all disabled people will be able to access the chat function in a meeting. It’s also important to consider that the people “in the room” may not be able to see the chat as they aren’t logging in electronically.

**Captioning should be of sufficient quality**

Some online meeting platforms provide automatic captioning but some are better than others. If the quality of the captioning is not good enough or there are a lot of specialist or technical terms being used in the meeting, then a separate captioning service may be required. UNISON uses CJ Captioning – enquiries@cjcaptioning.co.uk

**BSL should be provided if needed**

Where an attendee is a Deaf British Sign Language User then BSL interpretation should be provided. This can take the form of an interpreter in the room or joining remotely. UNION uses Interpreting Matters – office@interpretingmatters.co.uk

However thought needs to be given as to how those requiring BSL will be able to access the interpreter. For example, if the interpreter is in the room and the attendee is joining virtually, there will need to be a dedicated camera on the interpreter to ensure they are on screen at all times.

**Be careful with use of presentations**

For most platforms, using a presentation can obscure or remove entirely the BSL interpreter. It is important to be aware of this and seek work arounds with the Deaf members involved in the meeting so that you ensure their needs are being met.

**Screen sharing can be a barrier**

As with all meetings, many disabled members need items to be discussed to be circulated in advance. Introducing a new item that has not been circulated by sharing screen is not accessible. Disabled people who have barriers to reading or to processing information at speed will be significantly disadvantaged by this. Documents to be considered should therebefore be circulated in advance and should not be introduced for the first time via the screen share function.

There may also be issues with attendees being able to see the BSL interpreter where screen sharing is used on some platforms.

**Include virtual attendees**

Virtual attendees can sometimes be overlooked so make sure they are proactively called on to give feedback and speak. Make clear that side conversations in the room, not accessible to those joining virtually, are not acceptable.