



University of Essex



# OPEN TO ALL:

**Guidance on Inclusive  
and Accessible Events**

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# FOREWORD

Essex Business School (EBS) is a vibrant and diverse community, with staff, students and visitors from across the world, and from a wide range of backgrounds. The School is committed to promoting equality and inclusion amongst all staff, students and visitors. As part of this commitment, one of our priorities is to ensure that all School events are as inclusive and accessible as possible. We want our events to reflect and showcase the diversity of the EBS community and the full breadth of our research, teaching and professional expertise. It is vital that people of all backgrounds, career stages and paths feel included and able to participate in School events.

We have put this guide together, drawing on examples of best practice from across the higher education sector and beyond, to support colleagues who are involved in organising, hosting and participating in events, such as meetings, workshops, or conference streams, in the School and externally.

It is based on the belief that equality and inclusion are not things that can be 'achieved' or 'ticked off' once and for all, but are values that we should continually work towards.

Putting these values into practice is everybody's responsibility, and as members of the EBS community, we should all aim to be as inclusive as possible in the work that we do. In no sense is this guide definitive or prescriptive; we hope that the suggestions made will be the starting point from which we can work as we develop our ideas and practices, and continue to learn from each other's experiences. The guide aims to help event organisers make sure that debate – which is at the heart of academic exchange – takes place within a context that is mutually respectful. We have included a series of points to consider at the end of each section, and have summarised these at the end of the document in order to provide a point of reference for event organisers and participants.

We hope it is useful, and welcome feedback. In future, we hope that the measure of a successful EBS event will be not only that it has met its direct objectives, such as providing a forum for discussing specific issues, facilitating decision-making or creating an opportunity to showcase the work that is undertaken across the School, but that it has also actively promoted equality and inclusivity of participation.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION



## The School's Equality and Inclusion commitment states:

EBS is a place where staff and students recognise each other as valued members of the School and wider academic community, working together with mutual respect and integrity. We value a working and learning environment in which people are free to be themselves. The School respects the multi-dimensional lives of all its members and is committed to creating and supporting a learning and working environment in which staff and students can flourish in all aspects of their work and lives.

Organising, hosting and taking part in events is central to the work that we do in higher education. Both academic and professional services staff participate in a wide range and scale of events, sometimes on a daily basis. From informal 'catch ups' with our immediate colleagues to global conferences attracting thousands of delegates, events provide an important forum in which to disseminate information, share ideas, develop discussions and build collaborations. Events such as meetings, seminars and conferences can be settings in which inequalities are brought to the fore, or are reinforced, but they can also be important sites for change, bringing forth opportunities for activism, solidarity and engagement as 'spaces of learning, knowledge production and community' (Henderson and Burford, 2020: 1).

With this in mind, this document provides some guidance on the organisation of inclusive and accessible events that promote values of equality, fairness, recognition and mutual respect. It has been developed to help with the planning and hosting of all School events – such as committee meetings, training sessions, research seminars, conferences, open and applicant days and other activities,

held both face-to-face and online – to make them as inclusive and accessible as possible.

There are multiple reasons why adhering to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusivity in our organisational life is imperative in this day and age. Existing research has compellingly demonstrated that diverse and inclusive organisations achieve superior performance, for example, in terms of innovation, competitiveness and engagement with customers (e.g. Sherbin and Rashid, 2017). However, it is important not to judge the value of diversity and inclusion solely through the lens of the 'business case' argument. Crucially, inclusivity is about paying attention to the ethics of how we relate to one another in workplace organisations (Tyler, 2019).

In the UK, the Public Sector Equality Duty (part of the Equality Act 2010) requires universities, like other public sector bodies, to promote equality in their day-to-day work, including the planning and hosting of events. The Equality Act stipulates nine 'protected characteristics': age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or

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belief; sex, and sexual orientation. However, research shows that it is often the intersections between different aspects of identity (for example, being an older, disabled woman), and the ways in which these intertwine with more complex social and personal aspects of academic participation that have the most impact (Nichols and Stahl, 2019). Research also shows that universities still have a long way to go before they become free from racism, sexism, and any other form of discrimination or exclusion (Contu, 2020). Recognising this is important to promoting inclusivity and to avoiding perpetuating the 'rhetorical gap' between formal commitments to equality and what people actually experience in their everyday working lives.

Organising an event involves a range of decisions, such as when and where to hold it, what items to include and exclude from the agenda, what topic to focus on, whom to invite to speak and in what order. Each of these decisions has implications for how inclusive and accessible the event is. These decisions can reflect our unconscious biases – perceptions that we all have of individuals and groups of people who we see as different to ourselves, and that we form outside of our own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious biases, which stem from a tendency to organise social worlds by classifying and categorising (Platt, 2019)<sup>1</sup>. Events are a good example of how these can impact on work in higher education settings: when we select a topic and organise an event around it, with a panel or programme of invited speakers, it is easy for our unconscious biases to lead us not to question why certain individuals or groups might be over-represented, and others marginalised, particularly given the impact of time constraints and other pressures. When we invite speakers

(e.g. in our seminar series), or co-organise conferences, streams or other events, we often turn to those with whom we collaborate and hence perpetuate a pattern of working with people who are 'like us'; this homo-sociality results in unconscious biases being unchallenged, and patterns of exclusion being reaffirmed.

As a result, academic events such as conferences and seminar series can often be indirectly discriminatory and exclusionary, and this reinforces a sense of 'not belonging' in the field for those who are marginalised or under-represented (Jamjoom, 2020). Hence, it is important for event organisers not simply to be 'representative' of an established field, but to proactively take steps to tackle persistent inequalities, as far as possible. This goes beyond making everyone feel welcome and accepted, and involves acknowledging and taking advantage of the fact that events are valuable opportunities to recognise and counter-act persistent inequalities (e.g. by showcasing research, encouraging collaborations, and contributing to a more inclusive culture).

The suggestions made in the sections below, and 'Points for Consideration', are not exhaustive and individual event organisers may have to respond to other requirements, which are dependent on the requests made by participants. Nor are they prescriptive. The aim is to provide a reference point to help organisers take into account, at the different stages of planning, organising and hosting an event, or of participating in one, things that will help to make EBS events as inclusive and accessible as possible – open to all.



<sup>1</sup> Recent research by Bapuji and Chrispal (2020) shows the impact of this on academic participation. In particular, their discussion highlights how economic inequalities intersect with classifications based on caste in ways that can limit access to resources and support, as well as restricting opportunities for collaborative working and the sharing and dissemination of knowledge.

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# 2. MEETINGS AND COMMITTEES



As noted, EBS is a very diverse working and learning environment; meetings and committees are ideal opportunities to promote inclusivity and to encourage reflexivity and dialogue<sup>2</sup>. They give us the chance to listen and learn from each other (Dar et al., 2020) in ways that support and promote reflexive practice, including within and across work groups. Reflexive practice ensures that questioning the relationship between our values, beliefs and actions is embedded in our day-to-day ways of working together and is particularly important to tackling institutional forms of discrimination and disadvantage<sup>3</sup>.

Language is particularly important to consider in the context of meetings and committees; language is how we connect and communicate, but it can also be a powerful means of exclusion.

Research shows that linguistic fluency is not simply 'technical' but is embedded within power relations and perceptions shaping the ways in which different contributions are evaluated (Liwa and Johansson, 2014). An inclusive use of language involves using gender-neutral language as well as appropriate, non-discriminatory terminology (such as 'early career' rather than 'young' staff). It also requires prioritising communicative effectiveness, especially in multi-lingual settings where participants' language competence may vary. In practice, this means that both 'native' and 'non-native' speakers need to pay attention to whether the way they communicate contributes to inclusive and effective exchanges. When chairing, hosting or presenting, it is important to keep the multilingual nature of the School, much like academic conferences and other events, in mind in order to ensure that everyone is able to participate as fully as possible.

<sup>2</sup> Reflexivity generally refers to the examination of our own beliefs, judgments and practices, considering how these influence the ways in which we act and interact. 'Reflexive practice' involves questioning our taken for granted assumptions and the impact these might have not just on what we do, but how and why we do it.

<sup>3</sup> Allen et al (2019) propose the need for what they call an 'eco-centric' commitment to sustainability that reflexively embeds human actions in, rather than as detached from, our natural environment. They show how reflexivity enables us to appreciate our embeddedness in, and responsibility for, sustainability by bringing attention to the interrelationship between values, actions and our social and material environment, an approach that has important implications for how we plan, organise and take part in events such as e.g. international conferences.

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Meetings and committees are also an opportunity for different people, including academic and professional services colleagues, to bring a range of perspectives and sets of expertise and experience to the discussion, to make a contribution. Chairs and other participants should try to make sure that everyone who wants to, is given an opportunity to make a contribution. Meetings, whether held face-to-face or online, often have limited time slots; sharing the time available fairly is therefore important.

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Is the theme/focus of the meeting as inclusive as possible? Does it encourage a range of participants and perspectives?
- Is the date, timing and venue accessible to everyone who might want or need to take part? Try to avoid scheduling meetings during school holidays, or outside of 'core' hours so that working parents/carers are not excluded. If this is not possible, try to give as much notice as is feasible so that anyone who needs to is able to make arrangements, and if the meeting/committee is held regularly (e.g. termly), try to rotate the date/timing.
- For standing committees, consider having a rotational chair (e.g. group meetings), or deputy chairs (e.g. School meetings). Also, consider rotating the chairing of meetings between academic and professional services staff. Deputy chairs might take responsibility for a particular section of the agenda, or for ensuring full participation (e.g. hosting questions, making sure that everyone who wants to contribute is able to).
- If you are chairing the meeting, make sure that you follow the agenda and adhere to the specified timings for discussing different agenda items.
- Consider inserting a penultimate item on the agenda (e.g. before 'Any Other Business'), that would encourage contributions from those who have not had a chance to speak, or who wish to offer a different perspective on an earlier point (e.g. 'Speaking Up', or 'Speaking Out'). This might provide a space/time on the agenda for under-represented points of view that might otherwise be excluded.
- Chairs and participants should aim to share time in meetings fairly and equally (as noted above). Ideally, chairs and/or deputy chairs should try to find ways to ensure that no individuals/groups dominate the time available or the discussion, and to make sure that all participants can contribute.



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# 3. PLANNING AN EVENT



## 3.1. Choosing the theme

In the early planning stages, consider the theme and range of speakers that might be involved: aim to be as inclusive as possible, and to provide a balanced representation of the topic. Remember that theme choices are not 'diversity neutral' and that some themes are more likely to attract members of certain groups than others. Therefore, before settling on a theme, think about a) whether it is likely to result in an interest from a diverse range of participants; b) how to make sure that it does not lead to further marginalisation of groups which are already disadvantaged or relatively excluded.

Consider how calls for papers and invitations to participate are presented. Try to ensure that the wording and themes (including suggested contributions) appeal to a range of potential participants and perspectives. If practical to do so, organisers might wish to use an event to highlight the contribution of under-represented groups (e.g. women in Finance); to broaden topic areas (e.g. beyond areas that have traditionally been relatively male-dominated, or have yet to engage with de-colonisation), and/or to showcase those whose work is at a developmental stage e.g. doctoral students, early career researchers (ECRs). **Participants in all EBS events should be able to expect that the event will be as inclusive and accessible as possible, and ideally this should come across in the wording of invitations to participate and other related publicity.**

## 3.2. Inviting speakers

Women and people from Black and ethnic minority groups are less likely to be invited as speakers, especially in high profile roles such as keynote speakers (Dar et al, 2020; Henderson and Burford, 2020). A growing number of international conferences are committed to more inclusive panels and to thinking carefully about the order of speakers. For example, the British Academy of Management has a 'no all-male panels' policy for its events. At the same time, it is important to avoid 'tokenism' and to ensure that topics and speakers are chosen on the basis of expertise and relevance. Planning well advance, and having some flexibility over the timing of an event, is likely to considerably increase the possibility of being able to secure an inclusive panel of speakers (e.g. to include those who might need to make caring arrangements in order to be able to participate).

It is also important already at the stage of inviting speakers to be putting into practice the idea that ensuring inclusivity and diversity is everybody's responsibility, including members of traditionally privileged and dominant groups, such as white men. In line with other industries and sectors of work, academics are increasingly comfortable with declining invitations to speak on non-inclusive (e.g. all male, all white) panels, or to request that a commitment to inclusion is a condition of their participation. **We would encourage EBS colleagues to support this practice.**

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If you are organising an event or conference stream, consider broadening your search for potential speakers whose work would make a contribution from under-represented groups. Then personally invite them to contribute, or submit an abstract. If possible, for doctoral students and/or ECR colleagues, offer developmental opportunities to re-work abstracts and have them reconsidered. It might be helpful to think in advance of how many 'slots' are going to be available for speakers at the event you are organising, and how to ensure that these are 'filled' in a way that is inclusive and representative of the diversity of the EBS community and that positively contributes to diversity and inclusion within the wider field.

Encourage collaborative abstract submission for events or conference streams (and/or special issues of journals) to include doctoral students and ECRs as much as possible.<sup>4</sup> If appropriate, highlight that alphabetical ordering of authors' names is preferred. If this is not followed, ask how the order was decided and actively discourage authors being listed in order of seniority<sup>5</sup>.



### 3.3. Selecting a date

Give early consideration to when the event will be scheduled. If possible, try to aim for a start and finish time that will allow participants with caring responsibilities to attend as much of the event as they can. If possible, supplement live/synchronous participation with shared access to a recording, considering any relevant accessibility issues in the arrangements you make (see 4.1, below). Bear in mind that the University's 'working week' is from Monday to Friday and that scheduling events to take place over the weekend is likely to discriminate against

potential participants who have caring responsibilities. Further, remember that everybody's ability to remain in good physical and mental health requires that we take a break at the end of the working week. Consider 'core hours' for the most important parts of the event. Try to give people as much notice as possible to make any necessary arrangements, as this is likely to increase opportunities for participation particularly amongst those with caring responsibilities or additional needs. Speakers' availability is an important factor when choosing possible dates. Organisers should consider factors such as the timing of school holidays, relevant religious festivals (consult an interfaith calendar as dates for some festivals change each year), national holidays and potential caring responsibilities when suggesting dates, so that speakers and other participants have as much opportunity to participate as possible.

If the event is online only, consider organising the event in shorter blocks than you might do for a face-to-face event to avoid long periods of screen time without breaks, and to offer as much flexibility as possible. For live Zoom (or other video-conference based) events, find out if any of the participants will need a sign language interpreter. It might also be worth thinking about 'Zoom etiquette' and how it relates to accessibility. Practices such as displaying a picture when cameras are turned off, use of preferred pronouns alongside names, having an appropriate Zoom background, preferred use of the chat function etc. can all help to support an inclusive online environment. When organising a Zoom meeting, familiarise yourself with the University's *Online Meeting Etiquette guide* – see Appendix Two.

#### POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Is the topic inclusive of a range of perspectives and contributions?
- Is the panel of organisers and/or speakers as inclusive as possible? Are under-represented groups included?
- Has consideration been given to the date, duration and timing of the event?
- Have you familiarised yourself with the University's *How We Work at Essex: Online Meeting Etiquette guide*?

<sup>4</sup> Recent research on the experiences of sub-contracted academic researchers highlights that addressing inequalities in this aspect of academic work requires better recognition of the contributions, interests and concerns of contract research staff. This should include efforts to (a) understand how labour market precarity intersects with other aspects of inequality including, e.g. migrant status, and (b) the adoption of a more self-reflexive approach to the production of research, and a wider critique of the academic labour process (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> These kinds of issues might seem pedantic, even trivial to those not directly affected by them, but they respond to concerns raised by researchers studying the impact of power structures on academic work. Dar et al (2020) have recently shown, for instance, that academic hierarchies and working practices, often inadvertently, systematically marginalise, exclude and devalue the knowledge, experience and contribution of Black and ethnic minority colleagues. They highlight the need for collective action and of the implementation of 'intergenerational support systems' in our everyday working practices.

# 4. PRE-EVENT PREPARATION

## 4.1. Choosing a venue

The venue should be accessible for people who may have a variety of access needs. In addition, information on the range of facilities in the vicinity should be considered and ideally made available to anyone who may require, for instance, reserved parking due to access needs, wheelchair access, hearing loops, gender inclusive toilets, prayer rooms, and childcare facilities. The University works with AccessAble who conduct access audits on all University of Essex campuses so when choosing a venue, you may wish to check its accessibility via AccessAble's website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). Consider providing facilities for live streaming and/or recording so that those who cannot attend on the day can still participate, or access the recording and/or Zoom transcript after the event (see 3.3, above). Speakers and participants should be notified about what is being recorded and who will be able to access the recording after the event. Also, when planning an event, ensure that there is going to be a named IT contact on the day of the event who will be able to help in case of any 'technological emergencies' that might occur in the venue, such as issues with the hearing loop or display screen equipment, which can disadvantage guests with accessibility requirements.



## POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Has the accessibility of the venue been checked for any participants with mobility impairments, or visual or hearing related needs?
- Is there parking near the venue that can be reserved, if required?
- Have directions been provided on the event invitation and/or confirmation?
- Is the speakers' area accessible?
- If the content of the event includes flashing, flickering and strobe lighting that may cause a problem for some participants, are you planning to issue a warning to participants in advance?
- Are there toilets (male, female or all gender and fully accessible) within easy reach or located close to the venue?
- Is there a private or designated space near to the venue for people to use for short periods, for example, for religious observance, to administer medication or to take a break?
- Are there emergency evacuation arrangements and places of safety for people who may not be able to use stairs in the event of a fire or other emergency?
- Is there a named IT contact on the day who will be able to help in case of technological issues that might affect accessibility within the venue?



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## 4.2. Planning the format

If possible, consider event formats that foster collaboration and interaction and which are conducive to dialogue, reflexive exchange and the generation of new ideas and insights (e.g. smaller interactive workshops and discussion groups or round tables rather than formal panels, with traditional 'question and answer' formats). Multiple keynote speakers or small groups can provide a better platform for different groups and perspectives than single speakers. Encouraging 'work in progress' rather than fully formed paper presentations can also be helpful for encouraging doctoral students and ECRs to present their work. If you are organising a stream as part of a larger conference, there may not be much flexibility, but if the organisers are open to suggestions on the format, consider ways in which you could make your stream as inclusive as possible.

Avoid a format that risks marginalising the contribution of early career researchers. Encourage all speakers to acknowledge the contributions made by collaborators, and/or to co-present jointly authored work. Include doctoral students and ECRs in chairing presentation sessions, and/or in acting as discussants. If practical, consider a closing 'Going Forwards', future-orientated session that showcases emerging research by doctoral researchers and ECRs.

You may wish to consider the feasibility of doctoral students and/or ECRs being offering 'pairing' opportunities to provide mutual support at conferences and other events and/or being 'buddied' by a more experienced academic who can support and introduce doctoral students and ECRs to other participants. Publicising this at the outset might further encourage participation from less established/experienced contributors. Event organisers and/or research or probationary supervisors should also consider offering support with conference preparation to doctoral students and/or ECR colleagues.

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Has consideration been given to making the format of the event as inclusive as possible?
- How will ECRs and doctoral students be encouraged to participate and supported before, during and after the event?

## 4.3. Publicising the event

Consider where and how details of the event will be publicised to encourage a broad range of participants. Effective use of social media before and during the event can help extend the range of participation (e.g. live tweets and/or streaming). If publicising the event involves use of images, particularly of people, make sure that consideration has been given to diversity of those portrayed in the images.

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

- How are you planning to publicise your event to attract a more diverse audience?
- Which discussion lists and other forums are you planning to use?
- Are you promoting accessible and inclusive facilities available on campus that will be available?
- Are you using images of diverse people in publicity materials?

## 4.4. The registration process

When planning the wording of your registration mechanism (e.g. on Eventbrite) you may also wish to consider providing options for participants to: indicate their preferred pronouns; add access requirements; list any special dietary information, and provide any additional requirements.

It is good practice to include an accessibility statement in the invitation, registration and/or confirmation to all participants (including co-organisers and speakers). For example:

**“We will do our best to meet any requirements that will allow you to fully participate in this event. Please let us know in advance if you have any special requirements such as dietary needs based on religious or medical grounds, require presentational materials (e.g. slides) in advance and/or in alternative formats such as Braille or large print, or have any access needs such as, wheelchair access or the provision of hearing loops”.**

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Have you provided contact details such as an email address for participants to make requests for accessibility, reasonable adjustments and any other special requirements?
- If the event is residential, can you offer flexible options for participants to attend all or part of the event (this might be a chance to be inclusive to participants with caring responsibilities)?

- If photographs are going to be taken at the event, have participants been asked to provide their permissions in advance?
- Data protection: Has a statement been included in the invitation and confirmation for the event about GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)? This should be clear about how personal information, for example, access, pronouns, disability, will be stored, used and deleted.

## 4.5. Planning the schedule

It is important to consider the date, duration and timing of events in order to ensure that as many people as possible can participate. In timing the breaks, thought should be given to scheduling them, for example, for people who may need regular food intake relating to a health condition, and those using services such as interpreting or accessibility software. Full day events can be exhausting for everybody, and especially for someone with a disability, including ‘invisible disabilities’, e.g. chronic pain can make it difficult to sit for long periods of time. Keep in mind that some people’s circumstances might mean that concentrating for long periods without short breaks can be particularly difficult. Consideration should also be given to those who may be breastfeeding and will need regular breaks and access to a private room (not a toilet!).

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Have you scheduled one or more short breaks for events that are longer than two hours?
- Have sufficient changeover times been allowed for events that involve a number of sessions in different locations for participants with mobility needs to be able to move between them?



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## 4.6. Food and refreshments

As far as possible, it is important to consider participants' dietary needs and the needs of participants who may be fasting, for example during Ramadan. Thought should also be given to participants with any mobility needs, and how they can be supported (if required) during refreshment and meal breaks (e.g. if buffet style catering is provided, one of the organisers could provide assistance, if needed<sup>6</sup>).

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Have participants been asked via the booking system to notify you about any special dietary requirements, including allergies, vegetarian / vegan, Halal or Kosher meals (if your catering menu is able to provide such options)? Note: it is advisable to indicate to participants where special diets will be located at meal times.
- Will there be alcohol free refreshments for those participants who do not/are not drinking alcohol?



## 4.7. Preparation and provision of materials

All presentation slides and other materials should ideally be made available in advance and/or in accessible formats on the day. PDFs should ideally be avoided, as they are notoriously difficult to convert into accessible formats. We would also recommend asking speakers to ensure that their presentations are accessible to all (e.g. with respect to font style, size and slide colour schemes). You may wish to discourage animated, 'busy' or very text heavy presentations; as a general guide, presentation materials should be simple, accessible and flexible.

### POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Can electronic copies of presentations be obtained in advance, so they can be sent to participants on request? (Note: This is especially helpful for sign language interpreters, to familiarise themselves with any specialist terminology).
- Do you have access to facilities and software to convert presentations, handouts and materials into alternative formats, for example, large print or printed onto different colour paper, if requested by participants?



<sup>6</sup> With bigger events, it is common for organisers to involve students to assist on the day. If you decide to draw on students' help, give thought to ensure that the 'mix' of students supporting the event reflects the diversity of the EBS community.

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# 5. HOSTING AN INCLUSIVE EVENT



It is important to think about ways to ensure your event is inclusive and welcoming to all participants and that it actively promotes equality. Event participants often do not feel confident asking questions of, or approaching, people who they perceive as being more senior than they are. It is important to find ways to encourage participation (e.g. through Q&A functions on Zoom, or by sharing questions in other ways) that minimise the impact of this, and to try, as far as possible, to make all contributors feel welcome and supported. It is also important to acknowledge all participants and modes of participation during all events (e.g. colleagues who provided cleaning, catering etc.).

Event and/or stream organisers and session chairs should aim to give all participants who wish to do so an opportunity to contribute. Chairs could: take the first question, or 2-3 questions at a time, from participants who might change the dynamic of the discussion (e.g. those who might otherwise be overlooked, marginalised or feel less confident); use a mechanism to ask questions via an app or Zoom.

It is generally good practice to make it clear that all follow-on questions will be passed on to the speakers, and to encourage them to follow up. This not only provides a mechanism for everyone who would like to do so to ask a question or make a contribution; it also provides an opportunity to build potential networks and collaborations (especially for doctoral students and ECRs) and to encourage ongoing dialogue.

## POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Have you made participants aware that they can raise issues with a designated person if something happens during the event that is of concern to them?
- Aim to allocate chairing and/or discussant responsibilities to be as inclusive as possible. Consider asking chairs to take a question from a participant who might visibly change the dynamics of Q&A sessions.

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## SAFETY

Attendance and participation at all academic events depends on those involved feeling safe. One aspect of ensuring safety refers to following the University's procedures for Risk Assessment. For example, where organising events is concerned, if a visitor flags in advance that they have certain health and safety related requirements, it may be necessary to review and update Risk Assessments.

In workplace contexts, people's sense of safety is closely intertwined with intersectional inequalities. Organisers of events need to think in advance about how to ensure that none of the participants is going to experience either overt discrimination or more subtle forms of microaggressions<sup>7</sup> during the event (Blithe, 2020). **Creating and maintaining a safe, welcoming and mutually respectful environment should be a key priority for event organisers and participants; everyone involved should expect this.** To this end, all participants should know how to report any issues of concern, should they arise. The University has a code of conduct for events that all attendees sign up to when they register for events using Eventbrite. It makes clear that the University's policy regarding bullying, harassment and discrimination is 'zero tolerance'. The wording of this can be amended, as required.

It is important for organisers of all events to be proactive in minimising the risk of what researchers call 'reluctant acquiescence' as a response to unacceptable behaviour<sup>8</sup>. Organisers should feel confident in their capacity to remove from an event anyone whose behaviour is unacceptable, and/or which violates the University's 'zero tolerance' policy.



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# 6. POST-EVENT FOLLOW-UP

Consider asking participants to provide feedback on the inclusivity and accessibility of the event as a guide for future reference. Encourage follow on questions, if possible, especially from participants who may not have had an opportunity to raise them during the event. As noted above, this will help continue the dialogue opened up by the event, and encourage the formation of possible collaborative opportunities, including for future events, emerging from it.

## POINTS TO CONSIDER

- In what ways might the event have been more inclusive and accessible?
- What lessons, or examples of good practice were learnt? How might these be shared with others, including organisers of future events?
- Did the theme/agenda, timing and/or location of the event impact on inclusion and accessibility?
- If sensitive topics were discussed during the event, were they treated in an appropriately serious manner and handled sensitively?
- Were all modes of participations and participants recognised?

<sup>7</sup> A 'microaggression' is a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a disadvantaged individual or group. Often indirect, subtle, or unintentional forms of discrimination, members of marginalised groups are often subject to daily acts of microaggression in organisational contexts. Events can be important sites for perpetuating this, but also for recognising and challenging it.

<sup>8</sup> Movements such as 'Me Too' and 'Time's Up' have highlighted the organisational silencing and cultures of violence that can result from 'reluctant acquiescence' in response to harassment and other forms of oppressive, exploitative or discriminatory behaviour (Fernando and Prasad, 2019).

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# 7. WORK-RELATED SOCIAL EVENTS



Social interactions are an important part of the events we organise and take part in, both in EBS and externally. To ensure that work-related social opportunities are as inclusive and welcoming as possible, it can be helpful to vary the timing and choice of venue. Before circulating possible dates, it might be useful to give consideration to whether they clash with school holidays, key religious festivals and/or national holidays. Like conferences and other larger events, an annual social event that takes place at the same time every year might help to maintain momentum, but also risks excluding the same people each time. Ideally, start and finish times around peak travel periods should also be avoided as this can make events cost prohibitive. When social events are attached to conferences and/or seminars that involve external participants, consideration should be given to the feasibility of inviting speakers and other participants to bring family members including children with them, in order to encourage participation.

## POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Has thought been given to scheduling a lunchtime or daytime event, as this may be easier than an evening event for participants with caring responsibilities?
- Does the planned venue cater for everyone's dietary requirements, and budgets?
- Is the venue accessible to all participants?
- If the event is taking place in a bar/restaurant, will there be alcohol free alternatives?

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# 8. WIDER CONSIDERATIONS

The suggestions outlined above are issues that we can think about and enact at a micro level that might, hopefully, ensure EBS events are as inclusive and accessible as possible, and put the School's commitment to equality and inclusion into practice. It is important to recognise, however, that imbalances in event participation (e.g. meetings, work-related social events, conferences<sup>9</sup> etc.) are simply a microcosm of wider issues, and reflect intersectional, structural inequalities that are well beyond the scope of any day-to-day interventions we might be able to make, even collectively.

Equally, ensuring that the events that we organise and take part in are as inclusive as possible is not simply an individual responsibility but also rests with the School, Faculty and University, and with the wider communities that we work with (e.g. trade unions, professional bodies, standing conferences). Establishing and maintaining conditions that make it possible for staff to organise and fully take part in events, including meetings, conferences and social events, requires a fair and equitable distribution of work.

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MIGHT INCLUDE

- Access to funding to cover additional caring costs incurred by colleagues when attending events

- Allowing colleagues, including both academic and professional services staff, time off from day-to-day work commitments to attend conferences and other developmental events, and to discuss such opportunities or needs at regular developmental reviews
- Factoring collegial support work into workload allocations (e.g. to mentor colleagues to help them develop the skills and experience to be able to organise, prepare for and participate in events such as conferences).

These are just a few suggestions; finding ways to address the impact and persistence of structural inequalities is a collective, ongoing responsibility. Opening up opportunities for dialogue, reflexive critique and sharing good practice are all important to this, and to putting the principles of inclusivity, equality, recognition and mutual respect into practice in all aspects of our work in EBS and beyond. The events that we organise, host and take part in are central to this, providing important opportunities for reflexive practice, and to identify and enact more inclusive, accessible ways of working together in the future.

Thank you for reading. If you have any questions or comments, please get in touch.



<sup>9</sup> When organising a collaborative event, for example jointly with another Department or a professional body, make it explicit in advance that both you and the co-host(s) are going to work to proactively ensure the inclusivity and accessibility of the event.

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# 9. FURTHER RESOURCES

Useful information on organising conferences, seminars, and visitor programmes that are inclusive is also provided by the following organisations:

**THE AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION:**

[www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices/conducting-research](http://www.aeaweb.org/resources/best-practices/conducting-research)

**THE UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (UCU):**

[www.ucu.org.uk/article/4766/Equality-events](http://www.ucu.org.uk/article/4766/Equality-events)

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# APPENDIX ONE

## Summary of points to consider for organisers and participants

- Is the theme/focus of the meeting as inclusive as possible? Does it encourage a range of participants and perspectives?
- Is the date, timing and venue accessible to everyone who might want or need to take part? Try to avoid scheduling meetings during school holidays, or outside of 'core' hours so that working parents/carers are not excluded. If this is not possible, try to give as much notice as is feasible so that anyone who needs to is able to make arrangements, and if the meeting/committee is held regularly (e.g. termly), try to rotate the date/timing.
- For standing committees, consider having a rotational chair (e.g. group meetings), or deputy chairs (e.g. School meetings). Also, consider rotating the chairing of meetings between academic and professional services staff. Deputy chairs might take responsibility for a particular section of the agenda, or for ensuring full participation (e.g. hosting questions, making sure that everyone who wants to contribute is able to).
- If you are chairing the meeting, make sure that you follow the agenda and adhere to the specified timings for discussing different agenda items.
- Consider inserting a penultimate item on the agenda (e.g. before 'Any Other Business'), that would encourage contributions from those who have not have a chance to speak, or who wish to offer a different perspective on an earlier point (e.g. 'Speaking Up', or 'Speaking Out'). This might provide a space/time on the agenda for under-represented points of view that might otherwise be excluded.
- Chairs and participants should aim to share time in meetings fairly and equally (as noted above). Ideally, chairs and/or deputy chairs should try to find ways to ensure that no individuals/groups dominate the time available or the discussion, and to make sure that all participants can contribute.
- Is the topic inclusive of a range of perspectives and contributions?
- Is the panel of organisers and/or speakers as inclusive as possible? Are under-represented groups included?
- Has consideration been given to the date, duration and timing of the event?
- Have you familiarised yourself with the University's *Howe We Work at Essex: Online Meeting Etiquette* guide?
- Has the accessibility of the venue been checked for any participants with mobility impairments, or visual or hearing related needs?
- Is there parking near the venue that can be reserved, if required?
- Have directions been provided on the event invitation and/or confirmation?
- Is the speakers' area accessible?
- If the content of the event includes flashing, flickering and strobe lighting that may cause a problem for some participants, are you planning to issue a warning to participants in advance?
- Are there toilets (male, female or all gender and fully accessible) within easy reach or located close to the venue?
- Is there a private or designated space near to the venue for people to use for short periods, for example, for religious observance, to administer medication or to take a break?
- Are there emergency evacuation arrangements and places of safety for people who may not be able to use stairs in the event of a fire or other emergency?
- Is there a named IT contact on the day who will be able to help in case of technological issues that might affect accessibility within the venue?
- Has consideration been given to making the format of the event as inclusive as possible?
- How will ECRs and doctoral students be encouraged to participate and supported before, during and after the event?
- How are you planning to publicise your event to attract a more diverse audience?
- Which discussion lists and other forums are you planning to use?

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- Are you promoting accessible and inclusive facilities available on campus that will be available?
  - Are you using images of diverse people in publicity materials?
  - Have you provided contact details such as an email address for participants to make requests for accessibility, reasonable adjustments and any other special requirements?
  - If the event is residential, can you offer flexible options for participants to attend all or part of the event (this might be a chance to be inclusive to participants with caring responsibilities)?
  - If photographs are going to be taken at the event, have participants been asked to provide their permissions in advance?
  - Data protection: Has a statement been included in the invitation and confirmation for the event about GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)? This should be clear about how personal information, for example, access, pronouns, disability, will be stored, used and deleted.
  - Have you scheduled one or more short breaks for events that are longer than two hours?
  - Have sufficient changeover times been allowed for events that involve a number of sessions in different locations for participants with mobility needs to be able to move between them?
  - Have participants been asked via the booking system to notify you about any special dietary requirements, including allergies, vegetarian / vegan, Halal or Kosher meals (if your catering menu is able to provide such options)? Note: it is advisable to indicate to participants where special diets will be located at meal times.
  - Will there be alcohol free refreshments for those participants who do not/are not drinking alcohol?
  - Can electronic copies of presentations be obtained in advance, so they can be sent to participants on request? (Note: This is especially helpful for sign language interpreters, to familiarise themselves with any specialist terminology).
  - Do you have access to facilities and software to convert presentations, handouts and materials into alternative formats, for example, large print or printed onto different colour paper, if requested by participants?
  - Have you made participants aware that they can raise issues with a designated person if something happens during the event that is of concern to them?
  - Aim to allocate chairing and/or discussant responsibilities to be as inclusive as possible. Consider asking chairs to take a question from a participant who might visibly change the dynamics of Q&A sessions.
  - In what ways might the event have been more inclusive and accessible?
  - What lessons, or examples of good practice were learnt? How might these be shared with others, including organisers of future events?
  - Did the theme/agenda, timing and/or location of the event impact on inclusion and accessibility?
  - If sensitive topics were discussed during the event, were they treated in an appropriately serious manner and handled sensitively?
  - Were all modes of participations and participants recognised?
  - Has thought been given to scheduling a lunchtime or daytime event, as this may be easier than an evening event for participants with caring responsibilities?
  - Does the planned venue cater for everyone's dietary requirements, and budgets?
  - Is the venue accessible to all participants?
  - If the event is taking place in a bar/restaurant, will there be alcohol free alternatives?
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# APPENDIX TWO

## Online meeting etiquette

### Attendees

- Pre-prepare any points you would like to raise
- You may wish to join 5 minutes early to test your audio and video before the meeting starts and familiarise yourself with the features
- Avoid any noisy activity while you are in the meeting e.g. typing if you are not on mute
- Try not to multi-task, so that you can stay focused
- Look at your webcam, not at the screen so that people can see you
- Consider your lighting, it should come from the front or sides for clear visibility and your camera is at head height or above
- Keep your background clear of distractions or use a backdrop – you may wish to move items before a call or test a virtual background
- Use gestures and mannerisms you would normally use in person
- If you are not talking mute out, to avoid background noise
- Don't have side conversations, as this can be disruptive
- Think carefully before you use the chat function, are you happy for it to be recorded, could it be taken out of context, is it better to raise your comment after the meeting once you have had time to reflect
- If you struggle to sit for a long period of time consider using a surface where you can stand e.g. a kitchen worktop
- If you have to eat, be on mute or off screen
- There are a couple of keyboard short cuts – Alt + M allows you to mute and Alt + S allows you to share
- Try turning your video off if your connection becomes unstable
- If you intend not to use your video for technical or privacy reasons let the chair of the meeting know so they can adapt the meeting accordingly
- It is important to have pauses in your speech and allow others to contribute

### Chairs

- Review your host controls and settings ahead of the meeting
- Are you going to record the meeting? Let attendees know and remember this can be requested in FOI or data protection <https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/it-services/getting-the-best-from-zoom>
- Only invite people who need to be there
- Prepare any material you wish to share in advance
- Have a slide when people join outlining the expectations/ground rules of the meeting e.g. mute out when not talking, when will you take questions
- If you wish to share your screen, test it out beforehand
- Have an admin chair set up as a co-host to support you with functionality and take notes
- Introduce everyone on the call at the beginning
- Consider if people may wish to withhold their video for technical or privacy reasons and how this may impact the meeting
- Help everyone to focus, you may wish to disable the chat function if you feel it is a distraction, this can be done before the meeting
- If you wish to use the chat function explain clearly at the beginning of the meeting how it can be used constructively without causing distraction
- Understand your group size, if over 25 should it be a webinar? If you change your mind a meeting can be changed to a webinar
- Have a break if the meeting goes over an hour
- Consider 50 minute meetings to allow others to have a break before joining other Zoom calls
- Plan how are you going to deal with any questions
- Think about how you can ensure everyone in the meeting gets to speak
- Think about the layout of your meeting room if some individuals are together and some are on Zoom
- Ensure you have secured your meeting to prevent unwanted guests
- Do you wish to use the poll function to engage attendees during the meeting?