

# UQ GUIDE TO Inclusive meetings and committees

## What do we mean by meetings?

For the purposes of this guide, a meeting is considered any activity where a number of attendees formally come together to achieve a particular outcome. Meetings may be 'one off' activities to deliver a particular outcome (for example, a recruitment activity or awards selection panel) or a recurring activity (for example, a committee or regular team meeting of work colleagues). The practices in this guide are applicable to all types of meetings at UQ.

## What is an inclusive meeting?

UQ aspires to having a culture where all participants in a meeting feel welcome, valued and free to openly express their views. A meeting or panel is considered to be inclusive when:

- everyone is actively encouraged to participate;
- everyone has an expectation of being heard and feels comfortable sharing their views;
- measures are taken to reduce power/seniority imbalances;
- there is representation by different diverse groups (particularly marginalised or under-represented groups);
- the possibility of unconscious bias is actively considered/addressed; and
- voting or decision-making practices enable all participants to have an equal voice in meeting outcomes.

## Why do meetings need to be inclusive?

There are numerous benefits from ensuring that all meetings are as inclusive as possible. Some of these include<sup>1</sup>:

- more innovative outcomes through reducing 'group think';
- fostering genuine inclusion of all participants, which reduces the exclusion and/or marginalisation of certain groups;
- maximises all available expertise, not just the expertise of the 'loudest voice' or most senior participants;
- reduced opportunity for unconscious biases to impact meeting outcomes;
- improved decision making; and
- improved alignment to UQ values and strategic objectives.

<sup>1</sup> The diversity and inclusion revolution: Eight powerful truths (Deloitte); Inclusive Teams Playbook (Atlassian); How to Lead Inclusive Meetings (Forbes); How to Run More Inclusive Meetings (Thinkgrowth.org); Run Meetings that are Fair to Introverts, Women and Remote Workers (Harvard Business Review); Let's Get Practical: A Checklist for Inclusive Meetings and Events (The Inclusion Solution).

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### Attendees

#### The impact of unconscious bias

Unconscious biases are learned, social stereotypes that are formed outside of our conscious awareness, and which stem from our tendency to organise the world into categories to make sense of it. Our unconscious bias may **not** correlate with our conscious values.

We all have unconscious bias and may be familiar with the way this might play out in the workplace, particularly around the recruitment and promotion hotspots where certain groups may be overlooked because of assumptions made based on their social identity.

This unconscious bias can also manifest in meetings, minimising or erasing the contribution of introverts, or other groups who may not feel comfortable offering their opinions or actively participating, even when they have relevant experience. Over time, this can lead to feelings of demoralisation and disengagement by those groups, which can have flow on effects to the broader workplace.

By making conscious steps to mitigate exclusion, including that which is caused by unconscious bias, meetings can provide a more productive space where all employees can thrive. Inclusive meeting practices require equitable measures to be put in place to ensure that all voices have equal opportunity to contribute and be heard.



**All staff are encouraged to complete UQ's Unconscious Bias training.**

#### Power Imbalances

Power imbalances and decision-making inequities, particularly between committee and panel members where group decisions are the objective, are heightened in collaborative spaces.

For example, if the only 'woman' representative on a committee/panel is the most junior member (student representative), they may not feel as empowered to influence decision-making processes. Likewise, the only woman on a committee/panel may feel reluctant to speak up due to being outnumbered (irrespective of seniority).

Similarly, attendees in a more senior position may feel empowered to offer opinion or comment, regardless of whether they are most qualified in the area under discussion.

Chairs may be unaware of their role in mitigating potential power imbalances, and ensuring all members have an opportunity to inform decision-making.



### What the research says

It has been well documented that some groups are routinely overlooked in workplace meetings: women, remote workers, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and LGBTQIA+ attendees, and introverts, among others. A Harvard Business Review study found that just over a third of all employees felt comfortable regularly speaking up in meetings. In meetings of ten people, that means only three or four people may contribute. However, a greater variety of perspectives can be drawn upon when all participants actively contribute, protecting against "group-think" and increasing innovation.

Research has also shown us that women are twice as likely to be interrupted in meetings. Men from CALD communities experience similar circumstances and CALD communities in general may need more time to process what is being said before they feel comfortable to participate. Other groups who are typically marginalised or sidelined in everyday life, such as the LGBTQIA+ communities, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, also may not feel comfortable contributing in meetings.

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### Accessible and inclusive meetings

Some meeting attendees may face additional challenges when attending or participating in meetings due to disability. These challenges may prevent access to the physical environment where the meeting is held, or they may relate to accessing information or communication methods. Other barriers may be connected to invisible disabilities, such as anxiety or chronic health conditions, which may prevent a participant from engaging in the way they would like.

Staff who work remotely, for various reasons, may also face challenges when participating in meetings. COVID-19 changed the way that many teams and individuals work, and mainstreamed the use of online meeting technology. Prior to social distancing restrictions, remote workers were vulnerable to being spoken over or dominated by meeting participants who were physically present. However, as usual meeting practices have been disrupted to accommodate the global pandemic, so have these dynamics. UQ seeks to ensure that the inclusive meeting practices adopted through necessity during COVID-19 continue beyond the subsequent social distancing requirements.

UQ aims for all meetings to be as accessible as possible. An accessible meeting is one where:

- participants are proactively asked if they require additional supports or adjustments to maximise their attendance and participation in meetings;
- there are options for attending both virtually or physically, or just virtually; including options to attend virtually with camera off;
- non-physically present attendees are proactively invited to join the conversation/discussion;
- all participants have an equal voice in decision-making/voting, irrespective of location;
- reasonable adjustments are provided for attendees with differing communication needs due to disability (for example, providing written transcripts for attendees with hearing impairment); and
- the physical access needs of attendees are accommodated to every extent possible.



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### Inclusive dates and timeframes

Some meeting attendees may feel excluded or unwelcome if meetings are planned at times when they are consistently unavailable to attend. For example, care-givers or part-time workers may find it particularly difficult to attend meetings held outside school/respite care hours or during school holiday periods.

A highly effective mechanism for maximising attendance and showing consideration for all attendees' preferences regarding times/dates is to run a word poll which enables participants to indicate their availability for particular windows of time. The poll results enable meeting coordinators to select dates/times which maximise participant attendance.

Where practical and if possible, try to avoid scheduling irregular meetings and/or selection panels during school holidays or periods of peak activity at UQ (for example, during Research Week). If attendees have known out-of-work commitments at particular times or on particular days, try to accommodate these where possible and/or provide plenty of notice for meetings that may intersect with those commitments.

### Establishing a diverse and inclusive committee, team or panel

There is significant research confirming that diversity of thought, experience and background leads to improved organisational performance, decision making and innovation. All meetings, committee or panels should seek to be as diverse as possible, to maximise outcomes.

UQ supports the following principals to ensure diverse and inclusive meetings:

- 20 percent representation by either men/women or other gender identities.
- Gender sharing of key roles: To mitigate the situation where most UQ committees are chaired by men and most secretariat roles are fulfilled by women, UQ has mandated that the person selected to fulfil a key committee role should have a different gender identity to the previous incumbent.

Beyond meeting those principles, the most effective method of ensuring a diverse team/committee is to use an expression of interest (EOI) process

where diversity information is captured in the EOI documentation (ensuring the reason behind the requirement for this information is clear). The EOI information enables the committee/panel to be constructed in a manner that maximises diversity and inclusion outcomes.

To build diversity in meetings/committees/teams where attendees are selected on the basis of their position or role (for example, a Direct Reports meeting where all positions are held by men), consider inviting additional (diverse) staff as meeting participants, 'leadership shadows' or 'active observers' to ensure a range of different perspectives are factored into meeting outcomes. This also helps to build capability across the next generation of leaders and supports proxy attendance when the principal attendee is unavailable. While they may not hold formal voting rights, additional participants should be actively engaged throughout the meetings and their opinions and ideas listened to and valued.

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### Practical tips for inclusive meetings

#### Before the meeting

##### Time and date

- **Be considerate:** Provide plenty of notice for ad hoc meetings that may intersect with attendee's out of work commitments and responsibilities
- **Offer flexibility:** If you always host a regular meeting at a time that is good for one location, consider alternating to accommodate remote team members.
- **Meeting length:** Long meetings can be challenging, in particular for staff who are neurodiverse, have physical disabilities or for whom English is not a native language. Consider shorter, more frequent meetings and avoid scheduling back-to-back meetings. Ways to make meetings more accessible include offering movement breaks, encouraging the use of sensory or fidget devices and allowing camera off virtual options.

##### Agenda

- **Acknowledgement of Country:** Embed an Acknowledgement of Country as the first item on any formal meeting agenda. Incorporating this item into official meetings recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the land where the meeting is taking place.
- **Provide detail.** Send out a detailed agenda, at least 48 hours in advance. This will allow time for all participants to know what to expect.
- **Invite adjustments:** When sending out the agendas, ask if any participants will require additional adjustments in order to actively participate in the meeting.
- **Allow time:** Consider the available time before setting the agenda and ensure there is enough time for everyone to share their opinions. Time pressure can overwhelm or obscure less vocal participants.
- **Be selective** with meeting invitees, ensuring diversity of opinions while prioritising participants whose contribution is relevant.
- **Welcome input:** Let participants know ahead of time that their opinions and thoughts are welcomed and will be asked for. This will allow time for introverts and less-vocal participants to mentally prepare.
- **Indicate value:** Specify what you're expecting to get from participants and how their contribution will add value to the task.

##### Venue

- **Make it accessible:** Ensure that the venue is accessible for all participants. Consider both physical access requirements (such as ramps and lifts), as well as barriers to those with invisible disabilities (such as external noise and poor lighting). Consider holding a mixed-mode meeting which facilitates both physical and virtual attendance.
- **Clarify options:** Allow participants the opportunity to join virtually or in person. Make it clear that the mode of attendance is optional, as is the use of cameras if joining virtually.



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### During the meeting

#### Room layout

- **Consider layout:** Space chairs evenly around the table and avoid having people in the back or along the walls. Equal seating implies equal value.
- **Ensure engagement:** If participants are typically distracted on laptops during meetings, consider specifying that all participants are expected to be actively engaged to maximise involvement, or even consider having a “no laptops or phones” rule to maximise active listening.
- **Consider visible symbols of inclusion:** Signage, posters, flags etc. can send very strong messages of inclusion within a meeting/panel context.

#### Allocating roles

- **Rotate roles:** If one person or location is always presenting, consider asking another employee to drive the presentation.
- **Shift responsibilities:** If you always have the same person taking notes, consider asking someone different to do so<sup>2</sup>.
- **Recognise everyone:** If one group or person usually dominates the conversation, considering asking a quieter participant to Chair the meeting and encourage them to alter the format of the meeting.
- **Positive Participation:** All participants should recognise that a positive meeting is not just the Chair’s responsibility, and as such make every effort to engage and contribute towards positive meeting outcomes.

<sup>2</sup> Some Secretariat or Chair duties are written into some position descriptions or are attached to a particular role, so these will have less flexibility to alternate.

#### Inclusive decision-making techniques

Without pre-defined and consistently applied decision-making techniques, decisions within a committee or meeting context may be based on:

- the loudest voice/s
- the most senior person’s views
- group-think
- ‘assumed consensus’.

If the Chair uses phrases such as ‘I think we all agree that ...’ or ‘we all appear to be in agreement regarding ...’ without voting or another formal decision-making process, the decision may be based on one of the aforementioned tendencies.

For this reason, decisions should be made, to every extent possible via a motion which is then either agreed or disagreed by all attendees with voting rights. In situations where the attendees have a similar level of seniority or influence, open voting via a show of hands may prove effective. However, where there are significant differences in seniority or power imbalances, voting via anonymous ballot (via voting software, pen and paper or another voting mechanism) may be more equitable.

#### Inclusive chairing techniques

- **Be welcoming:** Introduce everyone by name and briefly introduce why each person has been invited. This diffuses tension and helps everyone feel valued and included.
- **Break the ice:** Commence a new committee or the introduction of new members with a short ‘getting to know you’ activity.
- **Use Pronouns:** Consider introducing yourself with your pronouns, which will indicate that the meeting is a safe and inclusive place and will normalise the process for activities beyond the meeting itself. Do not expect all participants to be comfortable introducing themselves with pronouns, as this should be a personal choice.
- **Speak last:** The Chair’s role is to facilitate the meeting, not to dominate discussion or be the primary decision-maker. If the Chair is in a position of power or seniority, expressing their views at an early stage of discussion may influence the thinking of the group or even silence those wishing to express a different view. For this reason, Chairs should seek the views of group members, before expressing a personal view.



*where there are significant differences in seniority or power imbalances, voting via anonymous ballot may be more equitable.*

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### During the meeting

- **Maintain order:** Set clear 'ground rules' at the start of the meeting and consistently refer to them if people break them (for example, applying a 'no laptops' rule). This includes specifying how decisions will be made.
- **Address potential conflict:** Conflict in meetings can be productive, but if left unchecked it can be destructive and derail meetings. Let people know they can speak openly and offer disagreements without fear of retribution. Be proactive - if you know there are conflicting views in the group, surface them early in the discussion and explore the differing points of view. Watch for conflict clues such as body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. Be fair and impartial by avoiding assumptions and being curious about the differing views presented. If emotions rise, consider creating a 'parking lot' for the issues that can't be readily resolved and move back to the agenda. Come back to the issues at the end of the meeting (if time allows) or reschedule a following meeting/discussion.
- **Include all participants:** Remind the room to include remote attendees (or in-person attendees if there is imbalance towards remote participants) and regularly check that they are able to follow the conversation.
- **Silence aggressors:** Discourage participants from talking over each other and call out interrupters. If you observe someone being silenced, make a point of giving them the floor.
- **Encourage involvement:** Provide space for everyone in the meeting to participate. Individually call on less dominant participants and try using closed-ended questions like "do you agree with ....?" This will give introverts an opportunity to expand upon their answer or not.
- **Give credit:** When a participant has a good idea, acknowledge their contribution and give them credit.
- **Draw conclusions:** Clarify action items as you go and repeat them at the end to make sure everyone is on the same page.

### After the meeting

- **Follow up:** Promptly circulate follow-up notes or minutes that capture action items and key points of discussion.
- **Invite feedback:** Consider inviting feedback on the inclusivity of the meeting. You can use wording such as: "Today, you may or may not have noticed, but I tried out something to make our team meetings a bit more inclusive for everyone. If you have feedback on how it went or something else we should try to make our meetings more inclusive please feel free to let me know after the meeting."





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### Tips for Inclusive Selection Committees

- **Diversity on the panel.** Try to achieve some diversity of panel members, where practicable, particularly gender diversity but also with consideration to cultural background and seniority. This is particularly important in relation to ensuring interview candidates feel supported and included (for example, would candidates benefit from having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative on the panel?).
- **Pre-agreed questions.** Consider developing and co-designing pre-agreed questions for all candidates and ensure these are followed to every extent possible.
- **Scoring against criteria.** Consider using pre-agreed scoring against interview questions. A more objective, evidence-based approach can assist with reducing the unconscious bias that may impact decision making.
- **Equitable experience.** Aim to ensure that all candidates are afforded a similar interview experience. For example, if one candidate can only attend virtually (via Teams or Zoom) ensure all candidates are interviewed virtually.
- **Complete training requirements.** Ensure that all mandated University training has been completed prior to taking a spot on a panel, as well as [Unconscious Bias](#) and other [diversity trainings](#) to ensure sensitivity towards diverse groups is maximised.
- **Consult with HR.** Consult with HR to confirm whether any requests have been made for reasonable adjustment to the interview process and how best to support the equitable needs of all candidates.
- **Signal inclusion.** When choosing a location, consider using visible indicators of inclusion such as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag and/or a UQ Ally poster.
- **Address power imbalances.** Consider any power imbalances that may be at play and address them early on to ensure equitable decision making power among participants.

### Additional UQ resources

[UQ Guide to Inclusive Events](#)

[UQ Staff Guidelines: Effective Student Representation on UQ Committees](#)

[Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country Guidelines](#)

[UQ Guide to Inclusive Language](#)





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### Checklist for inclusive meetings

- Aim to accommodate a time that is inclusive of carers
- Try to accommodate participants who may not be on-location
- Chose an accessible venue
- Consider visible symbols of inclusion in the meeting venue (Ally posters, flags etc)
- Include the Acknowledgement of Country in the agenda as well as speaking it verbally at the beginning of the meeting
- Send out a detailed agenda two days in advance
- Ask whether participants require additional adjustments in order to meaningfully participate
- Allocate appropriate time for the agenda
- Consider diversity of opinions when choosing participants
- Inform participants that their opinions and ideas are welcomed and will be asked for
- Inform each participant about how they will add value to the task
- Where possible consider rotating the role of Chair, Secretary or presenters
- Ensure that chairs evenly spaced around the table
- Welcome everyone by name
- Introduce yourself using personal pronouns
- Consider setting clear ground rules at the start of the meeting
- Set a no laptops or phones rule
- Create space for quieter participants to engage
- Clarify and seek to resolve any conflict throughout the meeting
- Give credit when a participant has a good idea
- Clarify actions throughout the meeting
- Ask for feedback at the end/following the meeting

### Checklist for inclusive committees

- Aim, where possible, for a panel that is diverse, including gender, cultural background and seniority
- Develop and co-design pre-agreed questions
- Use pre-agreed scoring against interview questions
- Consider whether all candidates are afforded a similar interview experience
- Check to see that all mandated University training, as well as other diversity trainings, have been completed
- Consult with HR to confirm whether any requests have been made for reasonable adjustment
- Use visible indicators of inclusion such as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag and/or a UQ Ally poster.
- Consider and address any power imbalances that may be at play

