England Conference of LMCs
Motion writing guidance

Policy making for general practitioners committee, England

The conference is the primary forum for creating and influencing policy related to issues affecting general practice. These policies form the basis for the work that is delivered by the general practitioners committee, England (GPCE). Policy is formulated at conference through debate and voting on motions submitted from the Local Medical Committees (LMCs), motions that are relevant to all nations are addressed at the UK Conference of LMCs. Motions that are relevant to all branches of practice or are of wider interest are submitted to the Annual Representative Meeting (ARM) for consideration and have the potential to become policy across the BMA.

What is a motion?

A motion is a statement and/or proposal that is presented to conference which will then decide if it should be supported. A representative from an LMC or committee submitting the motion will be given an opportunity to persuade the conference to agree with what it says, and any delegates who wish to speak against will have a chance to raise their objections before a vote is taken. The motion should clearly set out the issue that you want to discuss, and the action you want the conference to take. Delegates to conference can read the motion in their agendas, and it will also be projected onto the large screen at the front of the conference hall as it is debated.

Why motions and debate?

As the conference sets out the association policy on issues related to general practice, it is important that delegates should be fully informed on the pros and cons of adopting a motion before making up their minds and voting on it.

The system of presenting motions, and debating them, and then voting on them, provides a framework to ensure that ideas — motions — are all given an equal hearing.

Timed sections and chosen motions

It is likely that there will be more motions on the agenda than there is realistically time to debate.

The conference agenda committee shall as far as possible, prioritise motions in the agenda, aiming to allow a diverse range of motions to be discussed, with specific time allocated. Motions that cannot be debated in the time allocated to that section, shall be debated in any unused time allocated to another section

Motions that are very similar are bracketed together. Only the top 'starred' item is debated. Sometimes the agenda committee will create a composite motion from such a group so that all the similar motions can be debated as one.

Conference attendees are given the opportunity to submit up to 3 chosen motions, these are motions that have not made it onto the agenda and can be chosen from part 2 and brought into part 1 for debate. Chosen motions will be published in the supplementary agenda.

Debating motions

A set of standing orders are proposed and formally adopted at the start of each conference. These set out how the conference will run and the rules of debate and powers of the Chair. Though there are some minor amendments to the standing orders at each conference, the principles of how motions are debating are relatively consistent.

Generally, each debate focuses on a motion presented to the conference. The LMC who submitted the motion will 'propose the motion' – i.e. explain why the conference should agree with their statement or proposal. Next, there is an opportunity for an opposing view to be voiced. If there is someone who disagrees with the motion – or parts of the motion – they will now speak to persuade delegates to vote against it.

The Chair may then call extra speakers for and against the motion depending on how many delegates have indicated that they wish to speak (by submitting *speaker slips* before the debate begins). The time allocated for proposing/ opposing and speaking on a motion will be set out in the standing orders.

When the chair has allowed for a balanced debate or run out of people to call as speakers, then the chair will move to a vote. Sometimes the chair may ask the conference if they wish to move to a vote without hearing remaining speakers to help progress through the agenda or where all speakers have indicated on their *speaker slip* that they wish to speak in the same direction.

Once this has happened, the top table – i.e. the GPC England Executive Team/ Policy Lead for the area of debate will have the opportunity to make comments to inform the conference, and then the delegate who proposed the motion will usually have one minute for "right of reply".

This is their opportunity to sum up the arguments that have been made for the motion and respond to the arguments that have been made against, or comments from the top table; taking one last chance to convince the audience to vote for their motion. New points should not be introduced at this stage.

The vote

The chair will then 'move to a vote' i.e. ask the conference delegates to vote for or against the motion. The chair may also ask for abstentions. The chair will ask for all members who support the motion to raise their voting cards; then all of those who oppose the motion will be asked to raise their voting cards; and finally, those who wish to abstain may be asked to raise their voting cards.

The chair and other members of the conference agenda committee will count the number of those voting where the result appears close.

If the motion is 'carried', then it means that a majority of conference members voted to support it. The motion is now an England Conference of LMCs 'resolution'. If a majority of conference delegates do not vote to support the motion, then it is 'lost'. The conference does not support the statement/ proposal, and therefore, no further action is taken. Voting against a motion does not mean that conference supports the converse.

Multi-part motions

If a motion is divided into multiple parts or statements, then each part may be voted on separately. This can happen if delegates call for this from the floor (often by shouting "parts") or at the discretion of the proposer and/or Chair. Motions are usually voted on *in parts* where some aspects of a motion are more contentious than others.

Debating and voting at conference – the basics

Step 1 – Proposers speech
Conference top table

Deputy Chair | Chair | GPCE Secretariat, Executive Team/ Policy Leads
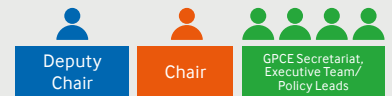
The chair of conference will call on the proposer of the motion to come to the podium and put forward a 3 minutes for the proposer speech.

Motion Proposer

Step 2 – Debate

Motion supporter | Motion Opposer
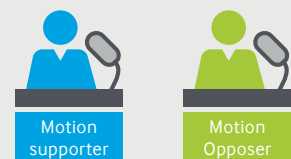
The chair of conference will have a list of speakers who wish to speak for or against the motion. Each speaker is given 2 minutes and the debate continues until there are no more speakers or if after a balanced debate 2/3rds of the conference attendees call on the chair to move the motion to a vote.

Step 3 – Top table comments
Conference top table

Deputy Chair | Chair | GPCE Secretariat, Executive Team/ Policy Leads
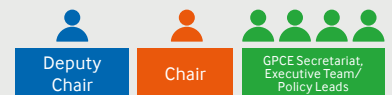
The chair of conference will ask whether the England executive team or policy leads wish to contribute any relevant information (not opinion) before the vote.

Step 4 – Right of Reply

Motion Proposer

Before the vote, the motion proposer will be offered one minute to reply to any points raised in the course of the debate should they wish to.

Step 5 – Vote

The chair will ask the conference to use their voting cards and call for them to raise them to vote either in favour or against the motion or to indicate their abstention. If a majority of voters vote in favour the motion is carried and becomes policy.

Drafting and submitting a good motion

From idea to motion
It is useful for anyone drafting a motion to bear in mind the 'three Ps', as these provide an outline structure for the motion:

Problem	Principle	Proposals
What is the problem that needs to be solved	What principles underlie the solution	What are the proposals that must be the heart of the motion

Questions to ask when drafting a motion

— Is there a problem? What is it?

— What is the solution?

— What needs to be done to achieve the solution? e.g. gathering evidence, further research, more funding, etc.

— Think about what you want to persuade the conference to agree to.

— Can the BMA:
— Solve the problem itself?
— Ask someone/something to take action?
— Raise awareness of the problem/its solution?

— Are the issues you wish to raise applicable to all general practitioners working in England?

What does a motion look like?

All motions at the conference should begin as follows;

"That conference…"

Then you need a verb. What is the conference being asked to do? Some suggestions include; "appeals"; "asks"; calls"; "demands"; "believes"; "considers"; "deems"; "judges"; "regards"; "backs"; "cares"; "defends"; "endorses"; "upholds"; "notes"; "recognises"; "is appalled"

The art of motion writing

Writing a good and effective motion is not a simple task. Motions should be clear, succinct and have a clear action. Motions that are likely to be passed or will encourage an important debate are more likely to be included in the agenda.

Your LMC secretary/chair should be able to help you with drafting an effective motion. The BMA also offers a motion writing advisory service which you can contact if you are having difficulty or are in doubt about the wording of a motion, this is available by emailing **motions@bma.org.uk**.

The conference agenda committee can also provide advice on the quality of motions.

Types of motions

Single point motions

At its most basic, a motion can simply be a statement; the aim in this case is to persuade the conference to agree with the statement.

e.g. "That this conference condemns research fraud" (This is unlikely to generate any argument, but makes clear the conference position and policy).

Statement motions with more than one point

More common are motions which make a statement, but perhaps have two or more points. In order for these motions to pass, the proposer has to persuade the forum to agree with all the points they contain.

e.g. "That this conference believes that dogs are better than cats and that cats should be eliminated".

In this case the person proposing the motion would have to outline the reasons why conference should agree to both the belief that dogs are better than cats and the belief that cats should be eliminated. It may be the case that the forum agrees that 'dogs are better than cats', but that it doesn't agree that cats should be eliminated. The forum would therefore not agree with the motion, and it would not be passed.

Parts

Dividing the points of a motion up into parts allows the points of your argument to be separated out, and to be passed (or fall) separately. Dividing a motion into parts also helps to simplify more complex motions.

e.g. "That this conference notes that dogs are better than cats and supports:

(i)   the elimination of cats;
(ii)   the subsidisation of dog food
(iii) tax breaks for dog owners

Each clause must be able to stand separately when added to the stem. The proposer might manage to convince the conference to support the statement that 'dogs are better than cats', but not manage to persuade the forum to support the elimination of cats. The conference could then agree that dog food should be subsidised, but disagree with dog owners receiving tax breaks. If it was agreed to vote on the motion in parts, then part (ii) would be passed, but parts (i) and (iii) would fall.

Common problems with motions

1. **The clauses don't follow on from the stem.**
Make sure that each individual clause in your motion makes sense if it is put directly after the stem, even if other parts of the motion are rejected.

2. **Lack of clarity**
Ideally, a motion will be passed, become a resolution and direct the policy of the BMA. When you speak to the motion, you can add more details to back up your argument, but the motion needs to be clear about what it is referring to, what it is calling to be done, and by whom.

    Make sure that you expand any acronyms the first time you use them.

3. **Asking for things which aren't possible**
If your motion asks someone or something to take action, make sure that they are in a position to take that action.

    For example, you can't ask that the BMA introduces a specific regulation governing the work of nurses, because:
a) the BMA is not a regulatory body and
b) the BMA is an organisation for doctors, not nurses.

    What you could ask the BMA to do would be to lobby the Nursing and Midwifery Council to introduce a specific regulation governing the work of nurses. The BMA is able to lobby other bodies, so this would be realistic.

4. **Not being succinct**
The fewer points that your motion makes, the fewer points there are for people to disagree with – and the more likely that it will be passed. Try to be as succinct as possible. Remember that when you speak to the motion you can expand and explain why you have asked for something. But *do* make sure that you include enough information for it to make sense when read alone!

5. **Don't include your speech in the motion**
You will need to propose your motion to the other conference delegates in a short speech. This is your chance to expand upon the motion and explain to other members why they should vote for it. You may be tempted when wording your motion to include some of what you plan to say for your speech (i.e. reasons the motion should pass, or background to the motion), but this will convolute the motion unnecessarily. The best motions that go on to become BMA policy are precise and to the point.

6. **Avoid the use of factoids**
A factoid is an item of unreliable information that is reported and repeated so often that it is assumed to be factual. Motions that contain such anecdotal facts cannot be validated, and there is a high risk that they will not be able to form part of BMA policy. They are also an easy target for speakers against your motion.

Submitting motions
When a motion has been drafted, your nominated LMC member should submit the motions through the **motions database**. If you require any further assistance please email **info.lmcconference@bma.org.uk**

Key Tips for Motions:

— Submit a motion! They are key to us developing and shaping BMA policy into the future, and to making your views heard nationally.

— Choose new and topical motions, rather than repeating existing policy: **check the existing policy database** before submitting any motion for the current position (or lack of) on your chosen topic. Conferences need exciting, topical debates, even if your motion fails it can still offer the conference a valuable perspective.

— Use parts if you have several clear calls for action. As each part, can be voted on separately, more controversial sections will not block the rest of the motion. Ensure that each part only deals with one point of principle, and that it would stand alone with the stem, without needing to reference other parts which may not pass.

— Try to include a proposal for action, rather than just affirming a position — this makes it easier for the BMA to bring about change, rather than just holding a notional stance

— Be concise, but clear — expand any acronyms, write in simple language where possible, try to keep below 150 words, and fewer than 3 "parts" after the stem, and avoid factoids which can't be verified or that you're not sure of

— Ask for help at any stage from initial idea to fully drafted — email **motions@bma.org.uk**, ask your regional staff or elected reps, or approach the conference agenda committee team directly — all will be happy to help.

— Be careful to avoid any libellous, defamatory, racist or offensive statements as part of your motion. The agenda committee will have the right to reject motions or parts of a motion that they interpret to fall into the above categories.

Key Tips for Speeches:

— Keep your speech concise and to the point of your motion, giving background and additional details only where they support the motion

— Try to plan your speech with an introduction, a section on each point of the motion or part, and the conclusion

— Remember that your speech will take 1/4 to 1/3 longer to give on the day than when you practice it. Check the conference guide for timings, and plan and practice accordingly

— Try to speak from bullet pointed notes if you can — you'll get lost in reading out paragraphs and it won't sound as genuine

— Ask for help if you'd like some! More experienced members are happy to help you form your ideas, suggest which bits of background are worth explaining, or help you choose the right words to say what you want to