

## Consultants Conference

### Motion writing guidance





## Policy making for consultants

The conference is the primary forum for creating and influencing policy related to issues affecting consultants. These policies form the basis for the work that is delivered by the Consultants Committee (CC). Policy is formulated at conference through debate and voting on motions submitted from the regional consultants committees in England and the devolved nation committees in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, Local Negotiating Committees (LNCs) and Medical Students Committee (MSCs), who will invite their local members to submit motions and ideas for motions. 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 the RCC, LNC, MSC or consultants 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.

## 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

What is the problem that needs to be solved

#### Principle

What principles underlie the solution

#### Proposals

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 consultants working in all parts of the UK? If so, you should remember to include reference to bodies/organisations across the four nations and not just the organisation/body with jurisdiction for your region.

## What does a motion look like?

All motions at the conference should begin as follows;

**“That this 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

Motions should be easy to follow, 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 regional committee chair, local negotiating committee chair and consultants committee members 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](mailto: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 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.

The conference agenda committee and secretariat will occasionally make amendments to motions to make them clearer, but if they don't know what the motion is trying to say, they will not be able to improve it.

### 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.

## 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](mailto: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.