

Present

Michael Tornow (MT)
Hussein Patwa (HP)
Linda Bamford (LB)
Marsali Craig (MC)
Naghat Ahmed (NM)
Susan Fulton (SF)
David Hunter (DH)
Hillary Stubbs (HS)
Audrey Burt (AB)
Joanne Devitt (JD)
Keith Robertson (KR)
Lucy Logan – Secretariat
Karen Armstrong- Sponsor Team

Apologies

Fraser Sutherland
Annie Milovic – Scottish Government Equality Team

Session 1: Knowing me, knowing you. MACS members spent time sharing and discussing their own access barriers and suggested solutions.

Barriers for those with sight and/or hearing impairments:

- Attending meetings or conferences in unfamiliar areas can be an issue. A solution would be to call the venue ahead to ask for additional support. If there is no way to contact the venue this poses a barrier.
- Conferences are useful for networking but if the venue doesn't release an attendee list in advance this create a barrier.
- Meetings which have papers laid out for attendees can be challenging as it means having to memorise the content in advance.
- Speed reading documents in a meeting can be hard to follow when the reader jumps to different sections without clarifying.
- In documents, comments/footnotes and diagrams cause issues for screen readers. It helps people with sight impairments if they are told what pages comments and footnotes can be found.
- Blind people experience interaction with others differently when they do and don't have a guide dog. For instance there are times where you may receive less assistance while you have a dog because others assume that you're already getting all the assistance you need. There are other practicality issues with dogs at meetings such as there being no plan in place for the dog when you are required to give a presentation.

Barriers wheelchair users have experienced when attending meetings in person:

- Planning pain management and altering medication schedules around face to face meetings can take at least a whole day a preparation, then several days to recover which often relies upon help from others at home. This causes anxiety and pain. Virtual meetings can be used as a solution to this.

- Venue parking is not always accessible, even when using a blue badge space.
- Venues often advertise as being accessible but they rarely are. Often there will be issues such as toilet locations and size, or floorings being incompatible with wheelchairs.
- Due to fire regulations, wheelchair users must be seated near the door. This can be polarising.

Communication barriers include:

- Written and verbal communication with long words and jargon can be hard to understand. The solution to this is Easy Read translations which MACS find works well.
- If someone has a speech disorder they may be hard to understand. MACS members agreed that it's difficult to know when to tell someone that you can't understand them.

MACS discussed the message that although members may have similar disabilities, each person will have completely different needs, experiences and preferences. For instance some wheelchair users don't like it when someone kneels down to speak to them, whereas others don't have issue with this.

It can be awkward for others not knowing how to offer help, instead it could be helpful to ask people their stories, rather than trying to quantify what they can and can't do. Disability equality training would also cover people fears about asking questions. Any training would need to be pan disability and not solely focused on MACS.

Session 2: MACS discussed the advantages and barriers they have experienced in remote meetings.

Advantages

- Takes away the need to alter medication and have days of potential pain and stress.
- Better time management meaning more meetings can be fit into 1 day.
- MACS can have more regular meetings, meaning current issues can be discussed and progressed which puts less time pressure on the quarterly main committee meetings.
- More regular meetings also cuts down on email traffic.
- MACS have been able to get involved in new work like the Transport Transition Plan (previously days of travel for meetings would not have been feasible)
- People with hearing problems can find it easier to hear virtual meetings.

Disadvantages

- MACS members miss the auditory and visual cues during meetings which you can only get in person. These issues include missing body language cues which assist in:
 - People with hearing or sight impairments being able to pick up cues which assists their own involvement in discussion
 - The chair being able to gauge when a break is needed
 - People who want to a challenge or make an argument can't gauge the mood or body language of others which makes it harder to present constructive challenges

Zoom does have a chat function as well as a 'raise hand' function, although these are helpful they still don't provide the same advantages that face to face meetings have. Additionally some MACS

members with sight impairments have difficulty using the raise hand function and screen reader doesn't alert them when someone has raised their hand.

- MACS member miss the social aspect of meetings. This can have a negative impact of mental health. A possible solution would be for MACS members to arrange some physically distanced social meetings to help reduce their feelings of isolation.
- Visual noise created by colourful or cluttered backgrounds.
- Because you are fitting so many more meetings in, it can be easy to forget to have breaks.
- MACS advise on travel and there is a worry that if they are no longer travelling, any advice will be based on memory.
- MACS all know each other but if they didn't, it would be hard/impossible to know individual needs.

MACS discussed using red and green cards to enhance their Zoom communication and tackle some of the issues above. A red card can be displayed if someone needs more explanation and green to indicate they want to speak.

Action Point 1: Secretariat to email AB to arrange cards for MACS.

MACS also expressed their concern that the Secretariat are still having issues with video conferencing. The Sponsor was able to assure MACS that Scottish Government staff are now able to use Zoom which should make contact with MACS more accessible.

Session 3: Building back better MACS meetings once lock down is relaxed

Some MACS member find being at home isolating and would like the opportunity to meet with the committee in person. MACS agreed that they would like to have the option of either attending a meeting in person or via Zoom and they look to the Sponsor Team to facilitate this.

MACS Chair does not plan to return to face to face meetings so hopes it will be possible to chair via Zoom. The Sponsor Team also have reservations about being required to attend meetings in person. These issues will be explored further when Victoria Quay opens which likely won't be until 2021.

The Sponsor Team rounded up discussion by listing the steps they have put in place to ensure MACS may continue to function with as little disruption as possible including funding the MACS Zoom account and recently paying the cost of MACS printing. The Sponsor Team continues to fund Easy Read translations to make written communication accessible and are also working towards altering the style of MACS minutes to make them easier to read.