SUPA Event Checklist

SUPA is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and supports our partner universities to provide a learning, research and teaching environment free from discrimination and unfair treatment. When we provide funding for events, we recommend that the following are considered. This should ideally be done at the outset, during the planning stages.

These points have been collected from personal experiences, research papers, and online platforms. Where available, we have included references for additional information.

The guidance that follows covers considerations during planning, the event itself and follow-up.

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# Diversity

## Speakers

* Those from under-represented groups can be less likely to put themselves forward for a speaking slot. Can you reach out to those groups in particular? Is there a ‘Women in physics’ group or similar near you, that could be used to promote the call.
* Imposter syndrome can stop people coming forward. Can you use language in your invitations that ask for knowledge and insight, rather than someone being an expert?
* Do you have a committee organising the event and/or judging applications for speakers? Is the committee representative along dimensions including career stage, race, gender, and other axes of identity?
* Do you have a blind review process for abstract submissions? Research in 2018 suggested that regardless of career stage, male committee members are less likely to select submissions from female researchers.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* How do you find speakers? Do you only tend to use people that you already know? How could you find others – can you use social media asking people to come forward? Are there particular research groups or colleagues you know at other institutions who you could ask for suggestions? Consider reaching out to different kinds of institutions (e.g. minority-serving institutions, think tanks, disciplinary associations) beyond your usual networks.
* When you email a male potential speaker, ask if they can also recommend a female speaker. They may have worked with others, networked with others, that you wouldn’t normally find yourself.
* Stick to time constraints. Ensure speakers speak for their allotted time only, where speakers run over it is often at the expense of those earlier in their career.
* Consider using an anonymous question tool such as [sli.do](https://www.sli.do/) where participants can ‘up vote’ each other’s questions, with the moderator asking all the questions, based on the top voted questions.
* Be mindful of who is chosen to ask the first question, as this sets the tone. Moderators should ‘see the whole room’ and maintain a balance of gender and seniority of those asking questions. Women are two and a half times less likely to ask a question[[2]](#footnote-2).

## Participants

* As with the language used to invite speakers, the language used in adverts and websites for an event can be gendered and impact on those who consider attending. Try running your wording through a gender decoder[[3]](#footnote-3) to see whether your wording is inadvertently more enticing to a particular gender.
* Some conferences have provided onsite childcare, is that something that you can do?
* Can you provide funding for supporting travel and/or caring responsibilities? Is the information about that funding clear on your website?
* Where participation is competitive, make the selection criteria transparent. Consider contributions to the sector beyond an academic CV (which can reflect past privileges and inequities)[[4]](#footnote-4), such as engagement with policymakers or the public, participation in mentoring programs.
* Does your registration system allow participants to spell their names with the correct diacritical markers (like accents and tildes) that aren’t necessarily in the English alphabet?

# Timing

* Does your event take place during core working hours?
* Have you considered what impact the timing of your event will have for those with caring responsibilities if it goes beyond core hours?
* Avoid scheduling on cultural and religious holidays.
* Avoid scheduling submission deadlines for abstracts or content on cultural or religious holidays, or just after these breaks. For example, avoid having a submission deadline of the Monday just after a half term, as this impacts on those who take this as holiday, primarily those with child care responsibilities.
* Consider also the impact of longer holidays, such as those in December. For example, do not announce a call on 18 Dec with a deadline of 5 Jan, as for many this will mean only a few work days to submit.
* Are any of your attendees participating from outside the UK? If so, what will the time be in their location? Plan an event that works for everybody, not just the majority.
* Sending an event agenda or programme in advance, with any papers required, allows people to prepare and know what to expect (which can build confidence in neurodivergent participants/speakers) and enables them to plan other elements of their day around the agenda, whether travel, childcare, other meetings etc.
* For shorter events, consider starting at five past the hour, and ending at five before the hour, to allow for breaks between participant’s meetings.

# Venue

* When people register for the event, include a question asking if they have any access requirements.
* Does your venue have a lift for those who can’t use stairs? Consider how your event would work if someone had a temporary access problem, e.g. if someone has a sprained ankle but still wants to come to the event, your venue may need to have a lift.
* Will you be putting up event signage, and is it suitable for those with visual impairments?
* Does your venue have gender neutral bathroom facilities?
* If you’re using a stage, how will people reach it? If someone is unable to use steps how will they get up there?
* Is there a suitable space for a BSL interpreter? Have you checked your institution’s BSL plan if it is in place yet, and does your event meet their requirements?[[5]](#footnote-5)
* Arrange chairs with plenty of space/aisles so people can exit the row easily to reduce anxiety or panic, this also helps those using mobility aids to move around more easily.
* Don’t assume everyone will be able to hear at the back of the room. If microphones are available, use them.
* If fixed in position, can all speakers reach the microphone?
* If using chairs, are they suitable for everyone’s abilities? Are they skirt/dress friendly (i.e not tall stools or deep armchairs? Could you seat the panel at a table with a tablecloth? Using chairs without arms accommodates people of all sizes.
* How much movement between venues will be required? Is it far, have you factored in sufficient time for travel between venues for all? Have you made it clear to participants where the different venues are and the routes/methods to get between, as well as how accessible each venue is?
* For larger, longer conferences, provide a quiet space, where people can go and switch off and recharge. Include guidelines that the quiet space is not for phone calls, and include sufficient signage to the quiet space.

# Catering

* Buffets can be inaccessible for those with visual impairments, is it truly your only option?
* Is there sufficient seating and tables for those that need it? Think about people using mobility aids, with arm weakness for example.
* Will you have alcohol at your event? Consider opportunities for socialising without alcohol. Many people will avoid it for religious reasons, or those with mental health conditions will avoid alcohol because of medical interactions, addiction or preference.

# Content

* Have you given advice to both oral and poster presenters on considering those with dyslexia or colour blindness in their design?
* Will any posters always be accompanied by their authors? Consider having volunteers available to read posters to those with visual impairments.
* Provide choice for conference materials in digital and/or print format. Digital can help those with visual impairments. Print can help those with learning disabilities follow along better.

# Online meetings

* Consider your platform choice and their limitations. For a larger meeting, Teams may not work so well due to the limits in the number of video views on screen. Zoom works well for large groups in ‘Webinar’ mode, but that restricts audience participation.
* Consider accessibility within your platform choices. Zoom allows a BSL interpreter to be pinned, Demio has neither subtitles nor BSL provision. Gather doesn’t allow subtitles but you can easily have a BSL interpreter ‘following’ someone requiring it, although you then need one interpreter for each user. Most allow participants to mute and hide their image, does your agenda rely on participants engaging with one another.
Deciding on your priorities for the event will help you decide the platform.
* Having one or two people with responsibilities for the online platform frees up the Chair(s). It is helpful to have someone who can admit participants, control video pinning, answer technical questions in the chat, give speakers sharing permissions.
* Organisers should familiarise themselves with the procedure for if there is a meeting disruption such as “Zoom bombing”. Zoom’s ‘Security’ button allows hosts to immediately cease any screen sharing, mute all participants and hide their videos, while an issue is sorted. How does your chosen platform mitigate these risks? Ensure the hosts know how to remove participants from your meeting.
* To reduce the risk of Zoom bombing, never share the meeting link openly on social media.
* Sharing your pronouns in your profile name (check if your platform allows this) can signify to others that you are a safe person to share their own pronouns with. Not all attendees will be comfortable sharing their pronouns, so it should never be obligatory.
* Where available, ensure the meeting settings allow participants to edit their own names/pronouns so others know how to address them (this is [possible on Zoom via this guide](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/4402698027533-Adding-and-sharing-your-pronouns), check other platforms).
* Communicate the guidelines for the event to attendees, e.g. should they keep cameras on if possible, should they be on mute when not talking, how will questions be invited, should attendees use the ‘raise hand’ feature or chat box if they wish to speak or raise a question?
* So that all participants are clear on any questions raised, it is good practice to repeat it after it’s been asked, read it out if it has been written in the chat box, and write it in the chat box if possible.
* Allow multiple ways of asking questions/engaging. Be mindful that not all attendees will be comfortable or able to speak out loud, or share their video.
* If a meeting or event will be longer than 1hr, consider whether a comfort break would be beneficial, which will help posture and concentration. If a coffee break length isn’t possible at that point in the agenda, consider a shorter (2-3mins) break where ALL participants turn off their cameras so they can move around without missing content.
* If you wish to use a meeting-branded virtual background, be aware that the distortions this can create on screen may interfere with visual assistance technology for visually impaired participants and can make lip reading and viewing body language more difficult for those with a hearing impediment. Additionally, text used on a virtual background will not be captured by a screenreader.
* When screen sharing, remember that any participants with a hearing impairment may find the reduction of the speaker’s image to a thumbnail difficult. Consider providing a guide on how to change your zoom layout to keep the speaker large or linking to the [Zoom support page](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362323#h_01FFTJBYEN08HGY727RWX9KCSX) with information on this topic.
* Give participants the option of subtitles. Most platforms now allow this option to be switched on, with each participant able to select whether to view the subtitles. This is useful for those with a hearing impairment but also useful for those who may be joining on the move or in loud environments. Microsoft PowerPoint also offers live captioning. Be aware that going into breakout rooms may disable automatic captions.

# Follow-up

* Encourage participants to explore opportunities for post-workshop mentorships with those they met at the event.
* Getting feedback from participants as well as speakers ensures that repeat events can always improve, and organisers can learn what works and what doesn’t for your audience.
* As well as asking about content, ask about the venue, catering, sound, presentations.
* It’s a good idea to share the outcomes of the event, especially for those who had to miss it or weren’t able to attend. Consider a range of channels to do this: collating social media feeds (numerous tools available online), videos, blogs, news items, as well as slides (if appropriate).
1. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-03809-5> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/women-much-less-likely-to-ask-questions-in-academic-seminars-than-men> and <https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2017/10/women-ask-fewer-questions-men-conference-talks-new-studies-suggest> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Inclusive Scientific Meetings, guidance from <https://500womenscientists.org/inclusive-scientific-meetings> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Under the BSL National Plan 2017-2023, all universities will be required to publish BSL plans, linked to Outcome Agreements <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/10/3540/6> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)