



VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Advice, Protocol and Risk Assessment

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The Geologists' Association has had cause to increase its usage of virtual meetings significantly, largely as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. The association anticipates that usage will continue after the pandemic, given the social trend towards virtual and home working. Therefore, it is useful to record some guidelines and assess the risks these meetings introduce.

At time of writing (September 2020) numerous platforms exist for virtual communication. Changes occur rapidly in terms of market leadership, effectiveness and flexibility. Therefore, although Zoom is currently the GA's platform of choice, the association recognises that other platforms (e.g. Teams) may come to the fore. The GA undertakes to review this situation as it progresses and adjust if necessary. However, for the purposes of this document, we will henceforward assume that Zoom is being used.

Meeting Advice and Protocol

For new users, the Zoom App may be downloaded free from this URL address:

<https://zoom.us/download>.

This is the authorized company website. Users are advised not to use alternative sites, which may be unsafe.

Zoom meetings can take several forms, distinguished by size and complexity:

1. Small, often *ad hoc* meetings: one-on-one, or just a few people
2. Larger, more formal meetings featuring a group of people (e.g. GA Council and Executive meetings)
3. Presentation of a widely advertised lecture to a large group of people (e.g. GA's Friday evening lectures)
4. A full-scale conference with multiple speakers.

In all 4 cases, the meeting's convenor/leader has to allow participants into the meeting before they can participate. Progressing from categories 1 to 4, increasing control is required by the meeting's leader. In categories 3 & 4, and sometimes in 2, the meeting leader is required to control who can speak at one time. They therefore must have the ability to mute participants, in order to control both the dialogue flow and extraneous noise.

Typically, in categories 3 & 4, only a few people in the meeting are allowed to screen-share. The convenor must thus disable screen-sharing for all but these participants.

The meeting convenors must also decide in advance how questions and answers are to be handled. Alternatives include a) orally, using "hand-raising" or b) through written comments in the "chat box" that can be relayed by the meeting convenor or designated overseer.

More advice on hosting Zoom Meetings, including the on-screen process, may be found here:

[Zoom Meetings](#)

or at this useful Kansas State University site:

<https://www.k-state.edu/it/pdfs/zoom.pdf>

Risk Assessment

The GA takes the safety of its members, and their personal and working security, extremely seriously. For this reason, the GA has performed a risk assessment for Zoom meetings, based on the experience of its members and on external reports. The assessment describes the risks, their potential effects and mitigating actions. The Zoom risk assessment has also been carried forward to form part of the overall GA Risk Register.

Further information on Zoom security may be found here:

[Zoom Meetings](#)

An informative document, detailing Zoom security procedures in the Church of England, is here:

[Zoom CofE](#)

For Zoom meetings, and particularly the large meetings in categories 2-4 (above), it is the Zoom leader/host's responsibility to make themselves familiar with basic Zoom security procedures. They should also read the risk assessment shown below, and advise participants of risks if appropriate. Participants are also accountable for their own safety/security, and the information provided by the leader/host should be designed to highlight this responsibility.

HAZARD (type)	RISK (nature of disruption)	SEVERITY (high, med., low)	ACTION(S) REQUIRED (to reduce/mitigate risk)
<i>"ZOOM Bombing"</i>	<i>Meetings are hijacked by uninvited people</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Host to accept people into meeting individually. Use waiting room and ensure meeting ID/passwords are only distributed to registered participant. Ask participants not to forward the meeting links.</i>
<i>Unknown participants in meeting</i>	<i>Unauthorized participant in meeting – risk to reputation / safeguarding</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Host to ask unrecognised participant to verify their name via Chat and be prepared to exclude them and send back to waiting room</i>
<i>Disruptive individual</i>	<i>Participant becomes disruptive during a meeting</i>	<i>Med/low</i>	<i>Host can put individual on hold and chat privately. Or expel an individual and then lock the meeting preventing them from re-joining.</i>
<i>Screen Sharing</i>	<i>Participants can deliberately or accidentally interrupt presentation</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Host to disable screen sharing for all participants. Presenter can be made a Co-Host to enable them to share their screen while restricting everyone else.</i>
<i>Background Noise</i>	<i>Meetings are disrupted and participants find it hard to concentrate and communicate</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>A participant's protocol should be run though at the start of each meeting as a reminder of how the meeting will be conducted to include Host ensuring participants mute their microphone.</i>

<i>Recording</i>	<i>Recording meetings required consent under GDPR</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Host to ensure meetings are not recorded unless agreed by all participants</i>
<i>Internet / computer failure or bandwidth</i>	<i>Meeting fails to start or with participants dropping out</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Host to test reliability of internet connection prior to meeting. Advance session arranged with key speaker/participant to test bandwidth. Ask participants to turn off their video as well as mute. A copy of backup slides on Host's computer Switch to Co-Host if internet connection unreliable for host Both the Co-Host and the Chair should have a list of participants and email contacts in advance</i>
<i>Meeting length</i>	<i>Discomfort and stress caused by meeting lasting too long</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Host to plan breaks at regular intervals. Individuals to turn off video if they need to leave the meeting</i>
<i>Unable to start meeting on time</i>	<i>Discomfort and stress caused to Host being unable to start meeting</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Host to share responsibility and make someone Co-Host. Alternative way to contact prior to meeting start and means of re-issuing meeting ID/password in case of failure. E.g. email distribution list to participants ready to go.</i>