

BRANCH LIAISON OFFICER

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Officers' Newsletter 207

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Meetings going forward

Dear All

Now that restrictions are being lifted and we can start to hold face to face physical meetings again, it is time to think about meetings into the future and what form they will take. Quite a lot of branches have successfully held virtual meetings using Zoom, as has the Society nationally (eg for the Society AGM, Trustee meetings etc), and many of us would like to continue to use what has become a very useful tool. In this way we can cater both for those who enjoy physical meetings and the benefits that go with these (such as informal conversations, networking, building and maintaining friendships), as well as those who cannot attend physical meetings but would still like to engage in activities and enjoy the presentations from a remote location - made possible by using a virtual platform such as Zoom.

The first decision to make is whether the meeting will be solely face to face, entirely virtual or a hybrid of the two. Information has already been circulated about virtual meetings and on-going help is available for this option and there is some good news about Society Zoom licences later in this newsletter. There is already plenty of experience throughout the Society with regards to face to face meetings but extra thought must be given to how we run them while the pandemic persists.

Face to Face Meetings

Covid is still a serious consideration and many people have concerns about how we go forward with face to face meetings. Whilst the government has lifted nearly all restrictions with regards to resuming 'normal' activities such as meetings, there are still legitimate concerns about keeping our members and guests as safe as possible.

Guidance is not going to be prescriptive because what is or is not possible will largely depend on the particular circumstances facing each branch such as the make-up of the membership and the venue itself. Some venues will have specific protocols that branches will have to respect and adhere to, and branch committees and members may also have individual worries. This means that some branches will prefer to continue with virtual meetings via Zoom for now, while others are planning to go ahead with face to face meetings. Please note: **YOU ARE FREE TO CHOOSE WHAT IS BEST FOR YOUR BRANCH.** The information on face to face meetings will apply to hybrid meetings too.

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Sensible precautions are advised for face to face meetings and it is **strongly recommended** that each branch complete a risk assessment. This will not only help you to consider what changes will need to be made in how the meeting is organised and run, but will also show how the decisions have been made should there be any queries or problems. With this in mind, please find attached as **Appendix 1** the sample Risk Assessment that was included in newsletter 193 in August 2020. This should be adapted to suit individual branch needs and any local restrictions in various parts of England as well as the different rules that may apply in the areas covered by the devolved governments of Scotland and Wales.

If you have any queries with regards to face to face meetings or completing the risk assessment, please ask.

Hybrid meetings

Hybrid meetings are another possible option and with this in mind, a few branches have already been experimenting to see what is possible. There have been one or two technical issues as we learn how to do this and these have been largely resolved although I am sure there will be more lessons to learn along the way. So those who have been experimenting have put together a few guidelines and ideas on how to set up a hybrid meeting. As a proof of concept it works for both forms of hybrid meeting (see below) and you will find the initial guidelines and two possible equipment set up diagrams attached as **Appendix 2** of this newsletter.

There are some things to bear in mind:

- If the meeting is to be hybrid, what sort of hybrid meeting will it be? Will it be face to face but broadcast simultaneously to those who are unable to attend a physical meeting in person? Will the speaker be presenting remotely with the presentation being shared on a screen at a physical meeting as well as being broadcast simultaneously?
- Make sure the speaker knows what sort of meeting you have in mind ie a hybrid, face to face or entirely virtual and that they are happy with that. What the speaker is or is not happy with will help determine what is possible.
- Copyright – this is one of the reasons why it is important that the speaker is fully aware of what sort of meeting is planned and that they are happy for the presentation to be shared more widely, especially if some of the material is copyrighted or not their own. This should be no more contentious than it is for Zoom meetings or regular branch physical meetings but confirmation from the speaker that they are aware of what sort of meeting it will be, and that they will not, to their knowledge, be infringing someone else's copyright. This is a sensible requirement and should be noted for the record. Branches generally check with their speakers anyway so this is not a new idea.
- Do **NOT** record virtual or hybrid meetings unless you have the express permission of the presenter. Zoom has recently introduced a new feature that advises all participants when recording starts and provides the opportunity to opt-out. This applies to any late joiners too so everyone will have the opportunity to opt out. Recording can raise all sorts of issues regarding copyright and privacy so it is much better not to record. If the speaker says no recording then this is not an option.

If you plan to try a hybrid meeting but would like some initial help setting it up, please ask as this can be arranged.

RCTS Zoom licences

The good news is that the Society has signed up for a charity discount on the purchase of Society Zoom licences. These will be administered by the Webmaster and will be made available to branches that are interested in buying their own licence at a 50% discount which currently means £60.00 instead of £120.00. Branches will be expected to raise the funds to pay for their own licence. If your branch would like a discounted Zoom licence, please apply directly to the Webmaster at webmaster@rcts.org.uk. The Society will continue to hold a central Zoom licence if you only wish to hold the occasional virtual meeting and do not feel that this justifies paying for your own branch licence. Again you will need to contact the webmaster about making mutually agreeable arrangements regarding date and time. If you should have any issues with dates or times, please ask as there may well be a branch with their own Society licence that can help if the webmaster or other national Society licence holder is unavailable. It may be possible, or even desirable, for branches to 'buddy up' with others over purchase of a Society Zoom licence. This could help make the best use of our resources as well as sharing with each other for the benefit of all.

If you would like a Zoom licence for your branch but have not hosted a virtual meeting before, it is a good idea to have a trial run first to make sure that you are familiar with the system and can operate it confidently. Practice really does help. If you would like help to get you going with 'doing it yourself', please ask.

It would be really helpful if you could let me know what your branch is planning for the new season so that any advice can be tailored to what you need. It also helps centrally to have a good idea of what type of meetings branches are planning for the future so that we can ensure sufficient access to Zoom licences for example.

I hope you find the information in this newsletter informative and useful and that it will help you to work out the best way forward for meetings into the future.

Kind regards

Irene

Appendix 1

Sample Risk Assessment

Company name: Railway Correspondence And Travel Society – XXXXX Branch
Assessment carried out by:(Name/s)
Date assessment was carried out: XXXXX 2021

This is a **SAMPLE** and must be amended to local requirements.

Based on the COVID-19 Risk Assessment Template published by the Health and Safety Executive 07/20.

As a branch committee, you must protect people from harm. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect your members, visitors and others from coronavirus. This is called a COVID-19 risk assessment and it will help you manage risk and protect people. You must:

- identify what branch activity or situations might cause transmission of the virus
- think about who could be at risk
- decide how likely it is that someone could be exposed
- act to remove the activity or situation, or if this isn't possible, control the risk

When completing your assessment make sure you talk to your members and visitors to explain the measures you are taking. They can also provide valuable information on how you could control the risks.

You can use this document to help you make sure you have covered what you need to keep members, visitors and others safe. Once you have completed your risk assessment you will also have to monitor to make sure that what you have put in place is working as expected.

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Controls	What further action is needed to control the risks?	Who needs to carry out the action?	When is the action needed by?
Virus spreading by persons.	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	Face coverings to be worn at all times unless outdoors and socially distanced.	As in the following sections.	All	At each branch meeting.
Catching or spreading coronavirus in common use areas.	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	Social distancing. Face coverings to be worn.	If it is not possible to maintain 2 metres social distancing then 1 metre plus mitigating measures (face coverings). Check venue protocols.	All	At each branch meeting.
Catching or spreading coronavirus by not washing hands or not washing them adequately.	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	Soap and water available in WC areas. Hand sanitiser at entry and exit points.	If your venue does not already have signage about good handwashing techniques, provide them yourself to encourage attendees to practice good handwashing techniques and to remind them to cough/sneeze into an arm and avoid touching their faces.	Branch Committee	Before attendees arrive for the meeting.
Catching or spreading coronavirus by contamination of: • Door handles • Switches • Other	Branch Committee Members/visitors	Check required protocols with the meeting venue and have a checklist handy at the meeting to ensure compliance.	Committee members to ensure that they are familiar with requirements.	Branch Committee	Before, during and after the meeting.
Catching or spreading coronavirus by contamination of: • Toilet	Branch Committee Members/visitors	Check required protocols with the meeting venue and have a checklist handy at the meeting to ensure compliance.	The toilet door handle, any part of the door that has been touched, flush lever, and seat if used, should be cleaned after each use or as per venue protocols.	All	At each branch meeting.

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Controls	What further action is needed to control the risks?	Who needs to carry out the action?	When is the action needed by?
Catching or spreading coronavirus by contamination of: Refreshment facilities	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	If it is practicable to safely provide refreshments, only specifically designated persons to do this. If it is not practicable, no refreshments to be provided.	Handling as little as possible by designated person(s) only.	Person serving refreshments. (Branch Committee to decide about provisions)	At each branch meeting.
Catching or spreading coronavirus in common use areas.	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	Check venue protocols and where practical use a one way system for entry/exit. Where not possible allow only one person at a time to pass through. Any others to wait at a distance until the area is clear.	None.	Branch Committee	At each branch meeting.
Catching or spreading coronavirus by contamination of equipment	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	For signing in recommend one or at most two people taking names and contact details.	None	Person designated to do signing in	At each branch meeting.
Catching or spreading coronavirus by contamination of equipment	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	Where there is a projector, laptop, PA system, only one person to set up each item and to be responsible for wiping it down and packing it away again after use.	None	Individuals designated to handle each item of equipment	At each branch meeting.

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Controls	What further action is needed to control the risks?	Who needs to carry out the action?	When is the action needed by?
Exposure to workplace hazards because it isn't possible to get normal personal protective equipment	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	Normal personal protective equipment (PPE) is not required at branch meetings.	None.	N/A	N/A
Catching or spreading coronavirus by contamination of money.	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	Donations given by means of a lidded container. The container is not to be emptied until a minimum of 72 hours has elapsed since the last donation.	Branch treasurer to keep control of the donations container and hold it until a minimum of 72 hours has elapsed before counting / paying in to the branch account.	Branch Treasurer	At and after each branch meeting.
Track and trace all attendees	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	All attendees sign in and out with their membership number. Non-members have to provide telephone number and post code.	Data is kept for 21 days as per government guidance and then disposed of securely. (Compliance with General Data Protection Regulations)	All	At each branch meeting.
If someone develops COVID-19 symptoms following attendance at a branch meeting	Branch Committee Members/Visitors	The person must inform a member of the branch committee urgently. The branch committee must then advise all who attended the meeting. The venue must be advised accordingly to advise any others using the building at the same time and to enable any additional cleaning to be carried out.	A record must be kept of actions taken in case of future queries.	Branch Committee	When and if necessary.

Useful Links:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches>

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Appendix 2

Hybrid (Physical/ZOOM) Meetings – RCTS Advice

This document is intended as advice – not as a prescriptive paper. Often the size and layout of the meeting room will determine the best methods.

The meeting room must have robust Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi is required to get an acceptable performance on ZOOM for hybrid meetings.¹

There is an exception to every rule and the exception in this case is to have a ‘mobile dongle’² for the presentation laptop³. This would have to be 4G or 5G. There is a cost to this.

The ‘Simple’ or ‘Amateur’ method

The speaker sits down in front of the laptop and talks just as if s/he were at home. This means that either (1) the speaker’s back is to the physical audience or (2) the speaker is facing the audience but their view is obstructed by the laptop. Either of these methods assumes (1) a small meeting room, (2) the ability of the speaker to project his/her voice so the physical audience can clearly hear and (3) silence on the part of the physical audience. Also any remote input such as questions must be clearly heard using the laptop’s speakers.

Again, there are a couple of exceptions to this rule:

- The laptop may be placed at an angle to the left or right of the speaker so s/he can use the laptop microphone but still be seen by the physical audience;
- External speakers may be plugged into the laptop but these must be sited to prevent feedback.

The ‘Professional’ method

The integrated laptop camera, microphone and speakers are impractical for the following reasons:

- The integrated camera and microphone would require the speaker to sit in front of the laptop instead of standing in front of the physical audience;
- The integrated microphone would require the physical audience to remain silent throughout;
- The integrated speaker is probably not powerful enough to allow all the physical audience to hear any remote participants clearly.

¹ The performance of the Wi-Fi and internet connection needs to be fast enough to support at least 2 laptops linked to the Zoom session (explanation below)

² Data dongle. Connect to the internet through a mobile network. Many dongles double up as a USB storage device. They require a mobile contract which is about £10 per month, or you may be able to find a ‘pay as you go’ contract.

³ Presentation laptop – the laptop normally used to run the PowerPoint presentation.

External Speakers

Buying external speakers for a laptop is no problem and they vary in price from about £20 upwards. Most, if not all, laptops enable external headphones to be used – the speakers should use the same slot. As mentioned earlier these must be sited to prevent feedback.

External Microphone

A wireless or Bluetooth external microphone is advisable, the cable of a wired microphone can be a trip hazard. A good one can be clipped to the speaker's shirt. That creates the problem that only the speaker can use the microphone, although that can be overcome (see below). This microphone will communicate with a box that must be connected to the laptop via a USB port, a sound card, or a microphone socket on the computer itself. These microphones with the necessary link to the laptop start at about £49 upwards. **Warning:** *you get what you pay for – cheap microphones may give poor performance.* Also, the controller of the presentation laptop may need to be able to switch between the external microphone and the integrated microphone. A handheld microphone creates the problem that the speaker needs also to be able to control the 'slides' via a mouse or similar. A static microphone is possible but it requires the speaker not to move, which may be practical if a lectern can be provided.

You may also need to buy a USB sound card. These are available online at Curry's Business for £10.31 excluding VAT (note for branch treasurers – VAT can be reclaimed provided that the necessary paperwork is retained for submission with branch accounts). Other options are available from other suppliers. This card allows both input (microphone) and output (speaker) 3.5mm sockets to interface with a laptop. Consideration as to the number of USB ports on the laptop is needed – there is normally a maximum of 2; separate ports for mouse, sound and data (speaker's USB stick) may require the use of a USB socket extender.

External camera

This is **NOT** essential but it does allow ZOOM participants to see the speaker and physical questioners (if this has been agreed) during the Q&A (Questions and Answers) session. This is expensive – upwards of about £150 plus VAT (potentially reclaimable) for a remote controlled camera.

The presentation laptop cannot be used as the host's laptop during a presentation. Therefore, a second laptop is required for the ZOOM host⁴. This must be manned and it is recommended that the host wears a headset with microphone. It is important that the integrated speakers on the host's laptop are muted during any presentation when the presentation laptop's external speakers are functioning.

If you already have a PA system, it may be possible to use this as part of the set up for a hybrid meeting, in which case you will probably not need additional external speakers and/or microphones. Exactly how you would set this up is dependent upon what sort of PA system is available. As usual, always test the system to make sure it works and whoever is designated to set it up knows what goes where. A set up diagram can be very useful in this context.

⁴ Host laptop. The host laptop also needs to use Wi-Fi or have a data dongle.

Diagrams A and B illustrate possible wiring set ups

Diagram A

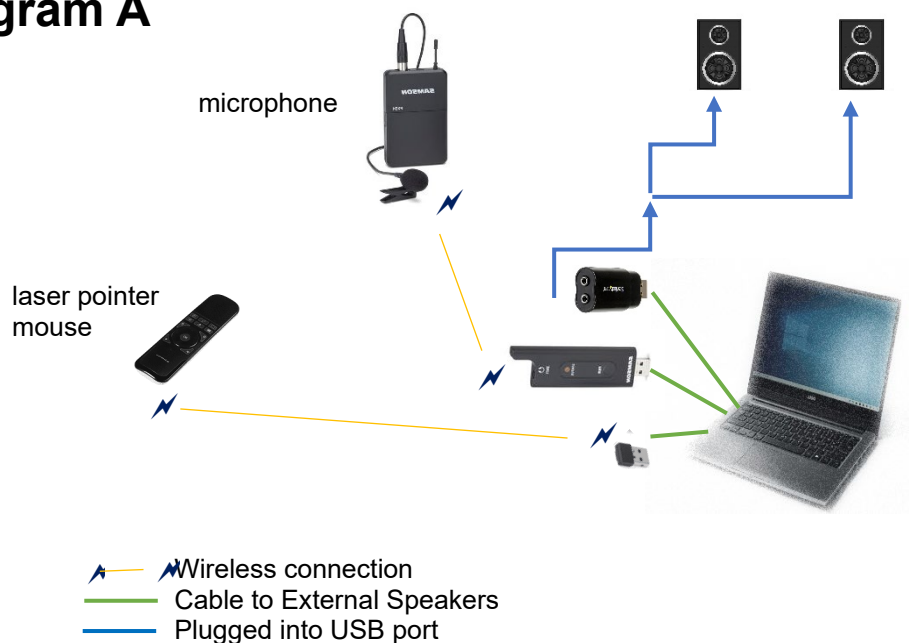
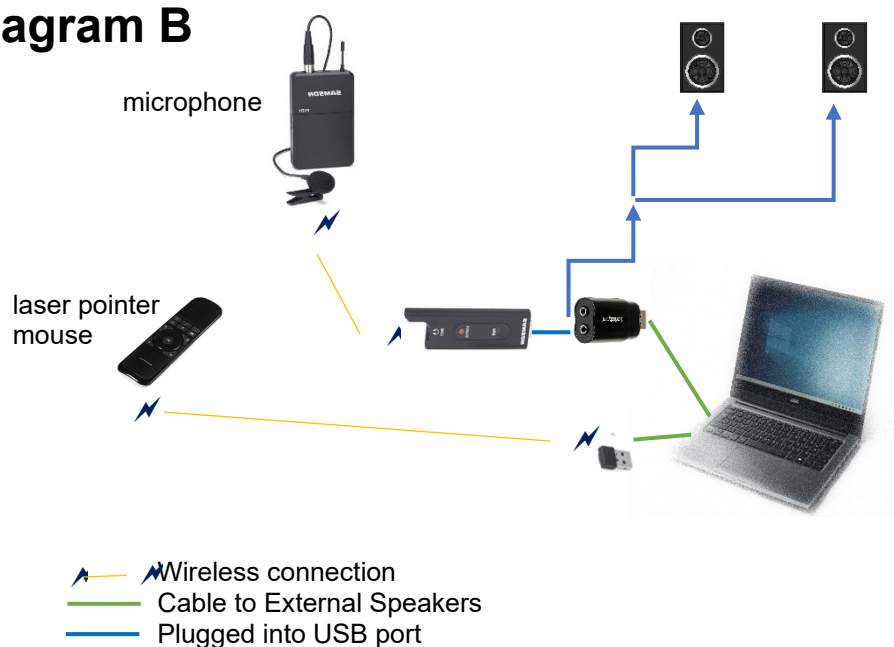


Diagram B



Courtesy of T Kolisch with contributions from others involved in the experiments