Widening access at RMA events

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Context

RMA Events range from small study days to the large, international conferences with the annual Student and general meetings. That RMA events are inclusive and welcoming is important for the wellbeing of its members and event attendees, and for the international reputation of the Association. It is also our priority that RMA events are run in line with the EDI considerations that are put in place for events run by academic associations of similar sizes.

As most of the organisation for each event rests with the hosting organisation, we want to mitigate against each event having to 'reinvent the wheel' on how EDI is embedded into each event. We therefore offer 'best practice' guidance in this document so that event organising committees can take the below pointers into consideration. The below suggestions are not prescriptive; each event will have bespoke considerations to accommodate. We do, however, encourage event organising committees to discuss and consider the below points and to incorporate where possible.

Key considerations

In the context of the RMA's commitment to promoting diversity, equality and inclusion in all aspects of music studies, events should be planned with some key considerations in mind from the start. At the heart of any EDI considerations are the nine characteristics identified by the Equality Act 2010 as being legally protected from discrimination:

- Age: Protection for people of any age group, from young to old.
- Disability: Physical or mental conditions that have a substantial and long-term impact on daily life.
- Gender reassignment: The process of transitioning from one sex to another, or planning to do so.
- Marriage and civil partnership: Being legally married or in a registered civil partnership.
- Pregnancy and maternity: Being pregnant or taking maternity leave following birth.
- Race: Colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin.
- Religion or belief: Any religious faith, philosophical belief, or lack thereof.
- Sex: As recorded at birth, being a man or a woman.[1]
- Sexual orientation: Attraction to people of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes.[2]

"Discrimination" covers not only direct discrimination, where unfair treatment is based on a specific characteristic, but also indirect discrimination, where a blanket rule or policy has a disproportionately negative impact on people with a certain characteristic. For example, a conference that provides catering without vegetarian, halal, kosher, or other dietary options may unintentionally disadvantage delegates from particular religious backgrounds. Although the same catering arrangements are offered to all participants, the policy may have a greater

[1] See the Supreme Court judgment from April 2026 on the definition of "sex" in the Equality Act.
[2] As with the definition of "sex" above, the word is used in the Equality Act in the sense of assignation-at-birth.

negative impact on some religious groups than others, making it a potential example of indirect discrimination.

There are also many areas of life that are not explicitly covered by the Equality Act but that can nonetheless affect both participation and a sense of belonging at events. For example:

- Temporary illness or injury, or undiagnosed conditions.
- Socioeconomic circumstances: Not only current circumstances, but also personal history.
- Educational background.
- Caring responsibilities: Including childcare and family members with disabilities or health conditions.
- Being the partner of a pregnant person; experiencing a miscarriage; undergoing fertility treatment or adoption processes.
- Menopause.
- Personal characteristics or skills: e.g., confidence in public speaking, sensitivity to rejection, familiarity with unwritten expectations of academic etiquette, presentation design skills, introversion, et al.

Inevitably, not all considerations can be met—no event can be perfect for every attendee. Nonetheless, as a key principle, organisers should build in ways to keep these considerations in mind throughout the planning process.

The rest of this document is divided into the four main stages of event planning:

1. Identifying the core elements of the event: the committee, the venue, the date and time….
2. Programming the event.
3. Considerations for the event itself.
4. Following up after the conference.

At the end of the document is a list of useful tools and resources. Please contact the EDI Working Group Co-Chairs with ideas for additions to the list:

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1. Initial stages: the who, what, where, and when

Make-up of the Organising Committee

- Consider diversity and representation on the committee. This will help you as a collective to keep in mind the key considerations identified above.
- Is there a range of career stages and (inter)disciplinary expertise / gender / other intersectional considerations?
- Can you incorporate student representatives on the committee, even if it isn't a student event?

Date and Time

- Check for important dates in religious calendars. The RMA collects key festivals for the six major religions in the UK in a subscribable calendar here.
- Consider the times of prayer for religious groups and how it could impact attendance

- Avoid booking events over the school holidays as this limits the attendance of those with childcare responsibilities
- Announce the date and time as early as possible to allow people to make arrangements
- What networking possibilities are there for people who cannot stay into the evening, such as those commuting or those with caring responsibilities? Can you arrange options in the day?

Venue Considerations

- When identifying spaces to use for the main event, can you also identify the following to benefit various user groups?
    - A quiet space for those who may need to remove themselves from a high-sensory environment
    - A noisy space for those who might need to warm up with an instrument or practice speaking before their paper
    - A suitable place for prayer
    - A suitable place to breastfeed or for childcare
- When identifying venues for social events, think about how the space (or spaces) might affect people's capacity to participate and the way they interact:
    - Will there be lots of noise, or potential crowding?
    - Are there plenty of places to sit down?
    - What's the physical accessibility to the space like? Is there step-free access?
    - If moving between venues, walk the route in advance to ensure it is wheelchair friendly or investigate another route. Can you find somewhere in the programme materials to indicate how far the walk is for those with limited mobility?
    - If you are supplying food at a social event, can the venue cater to all dietary requirements (e.g. halal, kosher, vegan, allergies…)? This can be especially important around religious holidays (e.g. during Eid).
    - Is it appropriate to offer free alcohol at drinks receptions, or indeed any alcohol?
- Are toilets accessible? Is there a gender-neutral toilet in the venue?
- If possible, ensure that your venues are in an area of a city/town where people will feel safe.
- If possible, provide images of the rooms in advance for those who may be anxious, have mobility needs, etc.
- Ensure that signage is clear from entry.
- Ensure that speakers can be fully visible in the room for those with hearing impairments.

General considerations for text materials

- Carefully consider the choice of font for your text materials. Remember that even institutional fonts might not be very readable, so try not to default to it just because it's institutional!
- OpenDyslexic is a free font designed for dyslexic readers. You can download it here.
- If supplying printed materials:
    - Can you offer an option for large print?
    - Can you offer an option for coloured paper?
- Check important images with a colour-blindness resource like this one.

- Try and encourage speakers to consider accessibility in any slides they use. Try and model best practice in any centralised sessions. There's a more comprehensive guide available here.
- When supplying electronic information, consider whether to use Word documents, PDFs, or HTML. They all have their pros and cons.
    - At the very least, remember that both Word and PDF documents require the proper use of headings/styles and the reading order to be checked in order to make them accessible for screen readers.
    - In particular, pay special attention to tables, which are very useful for programmes but can be difficult for screen readers. Microsoft guidance on using tables in Word is available here.

Call for Papers

- When writing the Call for Papers remember that the language you use and where you publicise it will have enormous effects on who responds to it.
- Try and write in ways that explicitly welcome submissions from:
    - Underrepresented backgrounds.
    - Early career researchers.
    - Unaffiliated scholars.
- Try and find ways to circulate the CfP that will reach a range of scholars. For instance:
    - Share it on EDIMS and Women's Musical Leadership Online Network listservs.
    - Actively write one-to-one emails to encourage people to submit proposals, especially those who don't normally attend RMA events.
    - Consider including an EDI statement on your CfP.

Also worth considering

- How can the event engage the local community of the host institution (for example, reaching out to local music education providers / galleries / museums / charities if relevant)?

2.Programming

Costs

- Can you offer a reduced fee for parents?
- Can you offer a free place for carers of those with disabilities?
- Can you offer bursaries/scholarships for those on a low income or in education?
- Is there a way of inviting those on higher incomes to sponsor part or all of a reduced or free place?

Content Selection

- When identifying keynote speakers, try and consider a wide range of participants. Think about representation when nomination and selecting them.
- Try also to consider climate impact, in terms of nominating international speakers who would likely attend via air travel.
- When judging proposals, ensure that the process is fully anonymous to avoid issues of unconscious bias.
- The flipside of completely anonymous selection, though, is that structural reasons can result in access problems for speakers from less privileged backgrounds. For instance, a proposal from a speaker less enculturated in certain academic norms might be

rejected based on a perceived breach of norms rather than because of the ideas. It can be helpful to build in a stage of review that is designed to mitigate against this and prevent the inadvertent rejection of marginalised speakers for ultimately structural reasons.
- Are there alternative methods of question and answer for sessions, such as digital submission of questions and random selection?

Chairs

- Recruit a wide range of session chairs.
- Seek a balance between opening up chairing opportunities to those not already in your networks and approaching chairs who you know and trust.
- Develop clear guidelines for chairs around inclusive behaviour.
- It might be helpful to put guidelines for chairs and speakers in the same document so that both sides understand the other's position.

Scheduling

- There's a difficult balance to be struck between the viability of number of parallel sessions and how many abstracts are accepted. There may not be a perfect solution, but keep this in mind as you select content.
- Try and ensure that marginalised areas of research or papers with explicitly EDI-related content are programmed at times that all conference delegates are able to attend.
- For the Annual Conference and the RMA/BFE Research Students' Conference, schedule an EDI Plenary session for a time that will be convenient for all conference attendees. Typically, this is late morning of day 2.

3. The event

Meeting people

- What can you do to support people who don't know anyone?
    - Can you arrange for those who do not know any attendees to meet one or two people at the beginning of the conference, providing photographs and a time to meet so they do not have to enter alone?
    - Can you arrange a pre-meet the night before the conference for those who have arrived early and may not know anyone?
- Provide photographs and names of key organisational members in advance on social media/email for familiarity.

Name badges

- There are many opportunities available to support EDI work through the design of name badges.
    - Consider an option for pronouns to be added if delegates wish.
    - If organising a bilingual conference, consider ways of including preferred languages on name badges.
    - Different-coloured lanyards or stickers could indicate an interaction preference.
    - Badges (and/or bios in the programme) can include an "if you want to talk to me, ask me about...." line to encourage conversation.
- Consider a discussion among the orgnasiers of the EDI implications around institutional affiliations appearing on name badges. For instance, Independent

Scholars can be stigmatised, especially with fewer jobs and an increasingly precarious sector.

Video

- Consider including video streaming of presentations where possible.
- Also ask speakers if they are happy to provide a transcript to supplement videos of papers.
- Use closed captions where possible.
- If you're videoing events, make sure to ask those in the videos for permission to disseminate after an event, giving them the opportunity to review footage beforehand.

Conference itself

- Signpost any safeguarding measures (e.g., a variation of 'Ask Angela' on the back of toilet doors) including QR codes linking to the RMA complaints procedure.
- Train registration table attendants on EDI matters and safeguarding policies.
- Consider placing Security on the door in case of disruption. As a minimum, ensure that all staff on the 'front line' of the event know how to contact Security and what to do in case of emergency, including accessible exits.
- Try and arrange for 'welcome remarks' and announcements to be made by a range of staff (not just one person).

4. Post-conference

- Send a survey asking about inclusion and access to feed back to the RMA EDI Working Group and to implement in future events.
- Encourage EDI-specific questions in the post-conference survey.
- Try and have a post-conference reflection meeting to think about what went well / didn't go well regarding EDI at the event. Feel free to discuss this further with the RMA EDI Working Group, especially if there is experience to add to this document.

Useful tools and resources

British Dyslexia Association: Dyslexia Friendly Style Guide

- Around 10% of the UK population is estimated to have dyslexia. The British Dyslexia Association have produced a Dyslexia Friendly Style Guide. Download it here.

EDIMS Parents/Carers resource

- A Practical Guide to Making Events Inclusive to those with Parenting and/or Caring Responsibilities

OpenDyslexic

- OpenDyslexic is a typeface designed against some common symptoms of dyslexia. It is free to use and uses the SIL-OFL license, giving you freedom to use it for personal use, business use, education, commercial, books, ebook readers, applications, websites, and any other project or purpose you need.
- Download OpenDyslexic here.

Creating Accessible PowerPoints:

- A general guide to creating accessible PowerPoints can be accessed here.