

Women's Classical Committee UK

Guidelines for Supporting Carers and Organising Events



These guidelines are designed to assist those who are organising conferences, workshops, seminar series, round-tables, panels at larger conferences, and one-off lectures, in-person and online, and will be useful to those offering residential fellowships.

These guidelines encourage event organisers and institutions to take three steps in providing support for those with caring responsibilities: 1. think and plan; 2. reach out; and 3. support.

Event participants are professionals and experts, and they may have additional caring responsibilities that affect their ability to participate. These responsibilities must be considered by organisers, institutions, and participants, and are not solely for individual contributors to manage and negotiate.¹

This is especially important in ensuring diversity in contributors. Caring responsibilities are heavily gendered, and disproportionately affect women.² The mental and physical load of caring responsibilities prevents women experts from participating in professional activities that extend beyond the physical workplace, especially activities that involve overnight stays, extended absences, and overseas travel. Events that occur on what would normally be a non-working day or which require working outside core hours are obstacles to participation.³ The gender pay gap and the high financial cost of care dependency mean that those with dependents are less able than those without dependents to subsidise participation in professional extra-curricular events or additional research costs, and women are disproportionately affected.

¹ Although these guidelines focus on caring, there is considerable intersectionality with disability issues. However, they should not be used as a guide to improve disabled access to events as they are in no way comprehensive on this issue.

² Women do more unpaid work than men, and they make up the majority of informal carers in the UK. See [here](#). Last accessed 05.03.2020. The majority of unpaid work in the UK is completed by women, such as cooking, cleaning and caring, on average around 60% more than that undertaken by men. See [here](#). Last accessed 05.03.2020. Women are also disproportionately burdened with administrative and pastoral roles in UK Higher Education. This invisible labour increases the workloads of women but is not recognised within promotional criteria and is unrewarded.

³ Athena Swan defines core working hours as 10am-4pm.

If steps are not taken to support those with caring responsibilities, those who are carers will inevitably be excluded, with a disproportionate effect on women. Events will lack diversity in gender and disability terms.

Those with caring responsibilities should not be prevented from participating fully in professional events and conversations within their fields. In England, Wales and Scotland, the Equality Act 2010 protects individuals against direct discrimination if they care for someone who is elderly or disabled. In Northern Ireland, the law – under the Human Rights Act and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act – requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity for carers.⁴ It is the responsibility of disciplines, institutions and individuals to adapt and change to enable participation, rather than relying on the silent exclusion and the gradual elision of those who do not fit a narrow model of privilege and non-dependency.

The provision of support for those with caring responsibilities is a central strategy for ensuring gender diversity, not only in practical provision that helps to get women in the room, but in empowering those who are not white, male, middle-class and able-bodied to feel that they are included and that they can productively contribute to the scholarly conversation.

There are different types of caring responsibilities that affect contributors, including care for young children, dependent relatives, kinship care, and elder care. These caring responsibilities are diverse, and contributors will have a wide range of requirements. What can be a solution for one contributor will not work for another. Organisers should be proactive and ask about the requirements of contributors, and do their best to respond to individual needs rather than attempting to find a ‘one-size-fits-all’ response.

These guidelines present a best-case scenario in terms of how organisers can support those with caring responsibilities. Organisers may be constrained by institutions or a lack of resources, but they should do what is in their power to do; a little change can make an enormous difference. The responsibility to ensure diversity and equality of inclusion is collective, and institutions can often mobilise change on a larger scale than individuals. Institutions need to think seriously and take meaningful action to support and advocate for equality and diversity.

Steps for Event Organisers:

Think and Plan

1. Begin planning how to support those with caring responsibilities in the earliest stages of organisation. Becoming fully informed about the issues and the labour involved in adequately supporting those with caring responsibilities needs to be accounted for within organisational

⁴ See [here](#). Last accessed 16.06.2020.

time-scales. It is important that the financial cost is factored in at an early stage of organisation; it is unlikely that budgets can be altered after funding for events has been secured.

2. Those with caring responsibilities need more notice to participate in events in order to manage alternative care for their dependents. If events are organised with little notice, it is likely that the diversity of those able to contribute will be significantly adversely affected. Try to avoid significant or last-minute changes to the schedule. Those with caring responsibilities will be less flexible in arrangements and commitments.

3. Be aware of unconscious bias and stereotype threat. Organisers should not assume caring responsibilities based on career stage, ie. that PhD students will not be parents, or that only older participants will be affected by elder care.

4. Do not set a minimum time attendance on long conferences or workshops.

5. Try to select a venue that accommodates children and is as accessible as possible. Venues need to make efforts to be accommodating, and those with secure employment can make suggestions to help them achieve this.

Reach Out

1. Make your intention to support those with caring responsibilities widely known, and include this information when the event is first marketed, such as with a Call for Papers. Those with caring responsibilities may not expect provision to be made, so it may be necessary to reach out directly to participants in order to receive requests for support. Organisers need to make it clear what help is available, and how people should self-identify as eligible for that support.

2. Ask carers and disabled attendees about any additional requirements they have in advance of the event, such as the provision of free disabled parking. Ensure that accessibility information produced by the event venue is available to attendees at the outset. It will be helpful to attendees with accessibility requirements if they do not have to seek out this information themselves.

3. In order to gather information about the kind of support attendees require, organisers could include a short questionnaire to be returned with the Call for Papers if anonymity was not necessary, or a form on a relevant website that can be submitted anonymously.

4. Offer participation by remote access wherever possible for those with caring responsibilities.

5. Consider travel times and start and finish times of sessions from the perspective of those with caring responsibilities. If you do not know if those with caring responsibilities would prefer an overnight stay and an early start the following day or a slightly later start to enable travel on the day, ask attendees.

Support

1. Where possible, make financial provision for those with caring responsibilities. This includes paying for child-care, providing on-site childcare, or paying for indirect childcare costs, such as to enable those those who can share the care burden to travel to fulfil caring responsibilities. This would happen where, for example, the costs would be covered for an infant and partner accompanying the speaker in order for the partner to look after the infant at a conference. Financial remuneration may not be straightforward, but efforts should be made to displace the financial burden of care away from those who have caring responsibilities where possible. The choice of substitute care should remain with the care-giver. Organisers should not make the provision of financial support dependent on registered private care provision by a third party, whether these are residential care homes, private nurseries or day centres. This stipulation is inappropriate and unhelpful to many with caring responsibilities.⁵ The participant's institution is also responsible for providing adequate financial support to enable participation.

2. Where possible, pay all travel expenses, including more expensive costs. Contributors with caring responsibilities will be less flexible and less able to travel by the cheapest means possible. They could have additional costs, such as taking taxis for connecting travel rather than cheaper but slower methods like walking or taking public transport. They may also have to travel at difficult times in order to return early to reassume caring responsibilities. For example, a person may need to take a later train which would arrive at its destination late at night, meaning that a taxi would be the only secure means of transport for the final stage of their journey.

3. Provide reduced fees for those who can attend only part of the event and/or for those who will be attending remotely. Where possible, do not necessitate that non-refundable fees must be paid significantly in advance of the date of the event. For those whose plans may be subject to change at the last minute, such timescales can pose an additional barrier to entry.

4. Where possible, make provision for dependents at events. Have a family room for children, and a quiet room for rest, breast-feeding, feeding, and expressing. High-chairs, toys and books will be useful in the family room. Employers are legally required to provide a space for women who are breastfeeding to lie down and rest if they need to, so there should be facilities available at the venue. For those who are breastfeeding or expressing, a clean, warm and private room will be needed. Other equipment for lactation includes sterile work surfaces, washing facilities, and a fridge/freezer for the storage of milk. Toilets are not suitable places for women to express or feed in. Do not make prayer rooms temporarily available as spaces for breast-feeding or expressing. Identify baby changing facilities for the event and communicate this availability to participants. Schedule regular breaks so that women can breastfeed or express without having to miss the event.

⁵ For example, a recent study by Scope, a disability equality charity in England and Wales, found that 80% of disabled people identified a strong family network as something that helps them to live independently (Smith and Dixon 2018, *Independent, Confident, Connected*. Available [here](#). Last accessed 16.06.2020.

5. Provide free attendance for the carers of disabled attendees.

6. Where events are online, ensure that regular breaks are included in the schedule, allow participants to attend some or all of the event, welcome children or those being cared for on camera (with microphones off), or emphasise that it is fine to turn your camera off if necessary. During the pandemic, organisers could recognise that these are extraordinary times, and caregivers are welcome. If childcare grants are offered for in-person events, they should continue to be offered for online events.

7. Be aware that lone carers and single parents will be disproportionately affected by the issues raised here, and may need more and more sustained levels of support as a result.

This working document was approved on 2.11.2020. It is an evolving work in progress and will be updated to reflect best practice. Last updated 7.11.2020. If you have suggested improvements, please contact womensclassicalcommittee@gmail.com. This document was written by Victoria Leonard, and was improved by Eris Williams-Reed, Miller Power, Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, Alice Leonard, Liz Gloyn, Katherine Harloe, Anna Judson, Cressida Ryan, and Laurence Totelin.