# The VMSG Annual Conference:
# General Guidance for the Local Organising Committee

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Mineralogical Society

The Geological Society
*serving science, profession & society*

## 1. Introduction

The Volcanic & Magmatic Studies Group (VMSG) has been hosting meetings for over 60 years. The annual conference grew out of a series of 'research in progress meetings' that gave a forum for PhD students, post-docs and academics to present their work and also to network. The VMSG Annual Conference is now the premier UK volcanology conference and is increasingly attracting overseas delegates. These events are key to VMSG fulfilling its mission to "*facilitate discussion, in an inclusive environment, amongst researchers, industrial stakeholders, and other interested parties with interests in volcanology, igneous petrology, geochemistry and allied fields.*"

The guidelines below are primarily a result of experience gained from past VMSG conferences and are intended to help with hosting a meeting. You might find other helpful information in the *VMSG2020 and 2024 Equality & Diversity* reports. Copies of both are available on our website. The *Mineralogical Society* also has conference guidance documents available on its website.

The conference would not be such a strong feature of our community without the enthusiastic and dedicated contributions of the Local Organising Committee, so thank you for your interest in this. Hopefully these guidelines will make your task more manageable, and do not hesitate to reach out if you have more questions.

*Jenni Barclay (Chair), Sebastian Watt (Secretary), James Hickey (Treasurer), Katie Preece (EDI Officer)[1], July 2025*

## 2. General Principles

Due to the large numbers of attendees at VMSG Annual Conferences in recent years the main meeting (in which talks and posters are presented) is now usually held over **2½ days,** with an icebreaker event on the evening immediately prior to the first day of talks.

The conference is usually held during the first 2 weeks of January with a principle of running in a plenary session throughout.

This usually means that the number of abstracts submitted for oral presentation are oversubscribed. In considering this we ask that the local organising committee (LOC) maintain around 50% presentations from student presenters. Established researchers usually take the limited number of keynote and session opening "'scene-setting" slots. We also encourage the LOC to consider diversity and inclusion when designing the conference programme (e.g. keynotes, session chairs, oral presenters).

The LOC and host institution are warmly encouraged to **'put their own stamp' on the VMSG meeting** according to their interests and local specialties. This is an opportunity for host institutions to 'showcase' their own Departmental attributes within the broader ethos of the VMSG meeting, i.e. sessions should be designed so that the breadth of VMSG science is fully represented (social and physical volcanology, petrology, geochemistry, geophysics).

**Trips, workshops and outreach activities** have proven to be very popular in recent years and may be added to the programme according to demand and the LOC organisation, but the costs of

[1] This document is modified from the original version, which was compiled in January 2017 by Mike Widdowson and Richard Brown, and version 2 which was updated by Sally Gibson, Janine Kavanagh and Sami Mikhail in 2020.

these should be kept separate from the main conference. There may be funds that VMSG can help apply for. Please contact the VMSG Secretary for the latest opportunities.

The Annual Conference **must** at least **run at "break even" costs** and preferably budgeted with a projected £2 - 4k surplus. The surplus both allows for some contingency if registration numbers are lower than expected, and can be used to fund the generous VMSG student bursary schemes and some of our awards. The meeting should be run as inexpensively as possible to keep the cost burden on delegates to a minimum.

## Timeline of LOC organisational events

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mid-June** | LOC meet with VMSG committee |
| **Late August** | Finalising sessions / convenors, creation of website, newsletter article, first advertising of conference |
| **End October** | Abstract deadline |
| **Early December** | Conference registration closes |
| **December** | Finalise programme, final logistics |
| **Within first two weeks of January** | VMSG Annual Conference |
| **Late February** | Report due |

## 3. Code of Conduct at VMSG Events

VMSG has worked with the *Mineralogical Society* and *Geological Society of London* to ensure that appropriate Code of Conduct policies are in place for conferences and other events. Policies can be accessed here:

VMSG Code of Conduct

Geological Society Code of Conduct

Mineralogical Code of Conduct for Meetings and Other Events

Participants are expected to behave in a professional manner - harassment and/or sexist, racist, or exclusionary comments or jokes are not appropriate and will not be tolerated.

Harassment includes sustained disruption of talks or other events, inappropriate physical contact, sexual attention or innuendo, deliberate intimidation, stalking, and photography or recording of an individual without consent. It also includes offensive comments related to age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, language and accent, citizenship, ethnic origin, race or religion.

VMSG expects all participants to uphold the principles of this Code of Conduct and requests that there is a box on the registration form which delegates can tick to say that they have read and will abide by the policies outlined by the *Mineralogical Society* and *Geological Society of London*.

To facilitate reporting of any incident where the Code of Conduct is breached, we ask that members of the LOC and the VMSG Committee are readily identifiable via their name badge.

## 4. Attendance at VMSG Annual Conferences

The VMSG committee can provide information and advice on the projected attendance numbers based on past conferences. The attendance has been growing steadily, and is now typically around the 180-220 mark.

In recent years, the LOC have provided facilities sufficient for 2.5 days of talks (minimum 09:00 – 17:00 hrs) with seating for about 250, and about 80-100 posters.

Recent delegate numbers:

2025 Dublin (joint with MDSG): total 279 but 128 associated primarily with VMSG
2024 Bristol (60th Anniversary of VMSG): 206
2023 London: ~200
2022 Manchester (virtual conference): 330
2021 (virtual conference): 409
2020 Plymouth: 139
2019 St Andrews: 211
2018 Leeds: 195
2017 Liverpool (joint with TSG and BSRG): ~450
2016 Trinity College, Dublin: 180
2015 UEA: 200
2014 Edinburgh (50$^{th}$ Anniversary of the VMSG): 220
2013 Bristol: 220
2012 Durham: 200
2011 Cambridge: 150
2010 Glasgow: 130

## 5. Financial Considerations

It is essential that you liaise with the Treasurer during the planning of your conference.

### a. Registration costs

We want as many members of the VMSG community to attend the conference as possible, and this requires that it runs at the lowest reasonable cost. The VMSG Annual Conference should therefore be considered a “no frills” event so that students, ECR members and academics (who often attend without grant support) can afford to attend the meeting. Student registration costs should be kept to an absolute minimum, and in recent years this has been £100 - 125 (including the conference dinner) for “Early Bird” students and no more than £200 for academics who are members of the *Mineralogical Society* or *Geological Society of London*. Academic and industry registrations are therefore usually used to offset the cost to the students. However, some caution is required here; if the prices are too high the academic delegates may stay away and the meeting would become financially unviable.

Usually about 60% of the delegates are students and another 20% are early career researchers (ECR). 60% or more of the delegates tend to register before the "Early Bird" deadline.

'Day registrations' should be offered at a reasonable premium.

- VMSG committee currently has a member dedicated to sponsorship and they are happy to help with obtaining sponsorship for the event.
- Keynote speakers invited speakers and local organising committee travel and subsistence costs should NOT be met directly from registration costs. Neither is it permitted for the costs of registration for members of the local organising committee be fully defrayed. The only persons whose costs should be defrayed are the VMSG Award winner and the Willy Aspinall Award winner (these are covered directly by the VMSG committee via the VMSG Treasurer, see below).
- VMSG attendees who **are** *Mineralogical Society* and *Geological Society* members should receive a discount – this should be at least as much as the membership of the Mineralogical Society.
- Early registrations (usually registration before the abstract deadline) usually receive a discount (often £30-£50).
- On-site one-day registration has been offered in the past.

### b. Conference budget and Sponsorship

No meeting will be approved based on a costing that will lose the VMSG or its umbrella societies (i.e., *Mineralogical Society* or *Geological Society of London*) money. VMSG will underwrite the meeting, where financially feasible and subject to budget approval, and can offer support and/or deposit monies to the local committee to secure advance booking or venue, catering, audio-visual equipment etc. **Any surplus from the meeting is to be donated to VMSG in their entirety**. This money allows VMSG to support a generous student bursary scheme, and allows us to underwrite the future annual VMSG meetings (paying deposits for venues etc.).

The conference will need to secure external financial support to make it viable; this is achieved by **securing industry sponsorship**. The VMSG committee can provide contact details of companies who regularly support the meeting.

### c. Managing the budget and conference account

The budget and conference account <u>are not</u> managed by VMSG. There are two typical models:

(1) registration and finances can be run locally (by the host institution) or
(2) by the *Mineralogical Society* which can also provide an audit trail.

If the meeting is managed by the local organising committee and host institution, then there **must be a full auditable record (i.e., invoices, VAT etc.)** because our parent Societies are both registered charities and the VMSG account is externally audited annually. The VMSG and *Mineralogical Society* Treasurers will offer advice on this matter throughout the preparation of the meeting. The *Mineralogical Society* can provide full support (online registration and account management) for ~ £15 per delegate. Please consider this as an option as it may be cheaper than the local university options.

## 6. General Meeting Requirements

1) A 1 hour 'slot' for the **VMSG AGM** should be scheduled as part of the closing session of the conference. Immediately after lunch is usually best. During this, student prizes will be announced.
2) The session immediately before the AGM should have no student presenters to help facilitate mark collation for the student prizes.
3) A 30 minute 'slot' for each of the **Student Forum, the ECR Forum, and the EDI Forum** should also be scheduled (see below). Right before lunch or a coffee break works well.
4) **Plenary lectures** lasting 30 minutes (including any introductions/citations and questions) each should be scheduled for the VMSG Award Winner and the Willy Aspinall Prize (see below).

## 7. Sessions, Talks and Posters

### a. Sessions

Try to keep your advertised sessions sufficiently broad, while providing a structure that plays to both the host institution interests and the current vogue topics. Be willing to 'listen to the delegates' who register, and adjust sessions according to the abstract submissions received. The VMSG Committee can offer suggestions for session themes that are known to be popular and attract good research presentations.

Suggested sessions do not always receive enough abstracts to be viable. Be willing to combine proposed sessions, or create a larger more general session. The idea of a named 'Research in Progress' (RIP) session is not encouraged. Usually, a more imaginative and attractive session name can be offered to encompass those submissions which do not easily fall into the themes categories.

Inviting researchers from other institutions to act as **Session Chairs** is often a good way of ensuring that more-established academics attend. However, please ensure that diversity and inclusion are considered when inviting session chairs.

### b. Abstracts

The **abstract deadline** is usually October 31st or shortly thereafter. A template needs to be provided on the conference website. When advertising for abstract submission, please consider making a diversity and inclusivity statement as certain groups are currently underrepresented. Ask the VMSG committee for advice if needed regarding this.

The abstract volume should include a list of delegates, preferably listing affiliations and email contacts. PDF versions of past abstract volumes can be requested from the VMSG Secretary.

### c. Oral presentations

The overall proportion of oral presentations given by students should be the same or higher than the proportion of student abstracts.

The VMSG committee ask that priority for oral presentations be given in the following order wherever possible and to consider diversity and equality at all times:

- Students in their final year who have previously presented a poster(s) at VMSG
- Students who have previously presented a poster(s) at VMSG
- Students in their final year who have not presented at VMSG
- ECR presentations from those who have not presented at VMSG recently
- All other presentations

The LOC should design a registration/abstract submission form that collects this information. A list of student speakers should be passed on to the VMSG committee prior to the conference starting to enable them to facilitate marking for prizes.

There is not usually a limit on the number of presentations that can be submitted as a first author, but only one presentation can be an oral presentation.

In previous years, the form has asked delegates to give the details of any talk and poster presentations they have given at VMSG in the past 5 years.

**Keynotes** are welcomed at the start of each session: they encourage more established scientists to attend VMSG events who in turn give important feedback to early career scientists. Please ensure diversity and equality is considered when inviting keynotes.

It is always a good idea to avoid significant 'home institution' bias to those awarded oral presentations, and session chairs should not give a talk in their own session. Applying the criteria outlined above to determine speakers will help with this.

Oral presentations typically last 15 minutes (12 min presentation plus 3 min of questions).

d. Poster presentations

We recommend that:

1) **All posters should be on display for the entire duration of the conference.**
2) A minimum of two 2-hours as dedicated time to posters, and this is best scheduled during the day. If in any doubt, allocate more time dedicated to when delegates can look at posters. This works well immediately before lunch.
3) Make sure that there is sufficient space for the posters.
4) Adjacent posters are numbered as odd or even, and one session is held for odd numbers and another for even numbers. This avoids over-crowding around posters.
5) Posters are **landscape** format (as at many other conferences). This allows delegates to see the science at 'eye' level (rather than having to crouch to see key findings and conclusions) and also to present the same poster at closely timed meetings without the need for re-formatting and excess printing.
6) **Flash talks** (~3 minute presentations) are emerging as a particularly popular form of advertising a poster, and are an option to include within the schedule (although recent meetings have not scheduled these).

A list of student poster presentations should be provided to the VMSG committee prior to the conference to facilitate marking for prizes.

## 8. Refreshments

The best feedback from the conference has been when the teas and coffees and lunches are served in the poster locations, although it is understood that local venue constraints may mean this is not always possible.

The conference dinner **must be included in the registration fee** for all delegates. The dinner venue needs to be able to accommodate a minimum of 200 people. A 'seated' venue is preferable, but a mechanism can be put in place that allows changeover of guests between courses/events. The idea here is to give students and post-docs the best opportunity to network with 'senior academics'.

Coffee breaks will take 20-30 minutes – trying to do these faster is unlikely to work.

All dietary requirements (vegetarian, vegan, gluten intolerant, etc.) and allergies should be catered for during each part of the meeting that involves refreshments. If special dietary requirements are met by special plated options, make sure these are kept well out the way and are very clearly labelled.

Non-alcoholic options should be made available in the same quantity as alcoholic drinks when served. It is inclusive to also consider serving interesting non-alcoholic options instead of just juices/fizzy drinks. Both non-alcoholic drinks and wine should be served in glasses.

It is worth considering that alcoholic drinks do not have to be included in the price for the conference dinner. This reduces costs (for delegates and the meeting budget), and some delegates at other conferences have commented that de-emphasising alcohol was a positive change that they would like to see more of during future conferences. Equally, the provision of a complementary drink or two (including alcoholic and non-alcoholic) has also been well-received at a number of conferences in the past, especially where purchasing drinks from a bar at the dinner venue can be beyond the budget for most PhD students and ECR's.

## 9. PhD Student, ECR Forum and EDI Forums

The annual VMSG conference has traditionally offered an opportunity for PhD students to present their work and also to provide feedback via the VMSG student representative in a dedicated forum. We recognise that ECRs have been under-represented in VMSG activities so at VMSG2020 extended this opportunity to also include a forum for ECRs. Since VMSG2022, there has also been an EDI Forum, to give delegates the opportunity to discuss any EDI issues with the VMSG EDI Officer. These three forums are usually held for 30 minutes each (around lunchtime) and need to be included in the conference timetable.

## 10. Awards and Prizes: Recognising Scientific Contributions at the VMSG Annual Conference

### a. The VMSG Award

The VMSG annual conference is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the contributions made by members of our community through Awards and Prizes. The local organising committee should contact the VMSG Treasurer regarding conference support for the VMSG award winner.

The VMSG award winner usually gives a 30 min plenary lecture. This can be given at any point during the conference. In past years, it has been included with the main scientific programme or as an after dinner presentation. The VMSG award winner is supported by VMSG for accommodation, travel and registration..

### b. The Willy Aspinall Prize

The winner of the Willy Aspinall will also be asked to give a plenary lecture. The prize is supported by a dedicated fund that will cover the cost of registration, accommodation and travel for the award winner. This may not necessarily be awarded every year so please check with the VMSG secretary before scheduling this.

### c. Student Prizes

The VMSG committee awards the prizes for the best student Talk (**Bob Hunter Prize**) and Poster (**Geoff Brown Prize**) presentation. These are marked and ranked during the conference by the VMSG Committee, and funded by VMSG.

All student presentations must be clearly marked on the schedule (talks usually marked with an asterisk on the running order), and student posters should be marked on the list in the abstract volume and/or on the poster boards themselves (sticky dots on the poster board numbers is one effective method). This allows for quick identification of student work, and aids the Committee with their judging of the VMSG student presentations.

### d. Additional Awards

On occasions the VMSG annual conference has presented awards/medals on behalf of the *Mineralogical Society*. These have usually been presented at the Conference Dinner

Other prizes can be offered and awarded by the LOC, or by sponsors, but the VMSG Committee will not judge these prizes. Accordingly, additional prizes and awards cannot be called the “best student talk/poster” to avoid confusion.

## 11. Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity

The VMSG is committed to ensuring that our events represent the diversity of the whole community and have recently put together the following statement to emphasize our commitment to this:

*“VMSG aims to provide a supportive environment where all in the community are welcome and valued, and are keen to promote balance in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, geographical location, physical ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background and others. Our interest is in the science, and in your work.”*

We recognise that there may be several things that conference organizers cannot control with respect to equality, diversity and inclusivity, such as the proportion of people from any particular group (e.g. gender or ethnic background) who choose to study our science, who ultimately comes to the meeting, or whether they wish to present their work. However, there are important ways that organisers can help ensure the conference represents the diversity of VMSG. These include:

1. Who the invited speakers are
2. Who Chairs a session
3. Who has an oral slot (and who doesn't)
4. Who has a poster slot (and who doesn't)

And also:

5. What the advertising material says about encouragement of diversity
6. What impression the organising committee and the VMSG committee give about diversity both in advance of and at the meeting.

We have recently adopted a policy of announcing the proportions of student presentations (oral and poster) and gender statistics at the conference. We are also collating statistics from all conferences held after 2015 and making these publicly available. It is therefore vital that you make sure this information is readily available for you to collate from the conference registration form. Please contact the VMSG Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officer to make sure you are collecting the appropriate data.

There are also important steps that can be made to ensure that the conference is inclusive at social events. These include:

- Ensuring ample time for social interaction during the day, for those unable to attend evening events, within reason, considering the wider programming and budget available
- Making sure that there are a wide variety of non-alcoholic drinks available at evening receptions.
- Consider having a seating arrangement at the conference dinner that enables delegates to mix and meet new people. Recent models have included the organisers arranging seating plans in advance of the dinner. You should ensure that there is an 'opt' out for those who are uncomfortable with this type of arrangement.

You might also wish to consider:

- Displaying diversity by having stickers that delegates can use to display pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/their) made available at the registration desk to be affixed to name tags.
- Providing blank stickers and markers for adding any further information (e.g. social media handles, research expertise, etc.) to name tags if desired.
- Providing a designated 'quiet' room and supporting hidden disabilities, such as via the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard scheme. Wearing the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower on a conference badge discreetly indicates that a delegate may need additional support, help, or a little more time.
- Print name badges double-sided and in large font for increased visibility.
- Introducing a buddy or mentor system for those attending VMSG events for the first time.

- Consider providing all-gender toilets if the venue permits.

## 12. Ensuring an Environmentally-Friendly Conference

It is no longer deemed necessary for a conference to provide bags, pens and additional items (stationary, pads, freebies etc.) and VMSG is making positive steps to reduce the amount of all non-reusable materials (minimum plastic use) at its events.

This includes having the following:

- Electronic versions of conference abstract volumes (pdfs) rather than printed hard copies (though some printed hard copies on walls around the conference venue are often useful)
- Reusable cups, or asking members to bring a reusable cup and water bottles with them
- Reusable plastic badge holders

We also request that conference organisers recommend travel by public transport or car sharing to delegates.

## 13. Publicity & Social Media

A **conference website** should be created well in advance of the abstract deadline and can be hosted on the VMSG website if needed. Costs for developing a website commercially will not be approved by the VMSG committee.

The website should include information on the conference venue, accommodation options and travel.

Organisers should advertise the conference as widely as possible, including the VMSG website, VMSG newsletter and social media. Please contact the VMSG webmaster, newsletter editor and Social media rep to arrange this. They should also arrange for it to be listed in the various meeting calendars and newsletters used by the community (AGU, EGU, IAVCEI etc.), and on the *Mineralogical Society* and *Geological Society* websites.

VMSG has an active social media presence (especially on X, BlueSky, Facebook and Instagram). A social media policy should be included in the abstract volume and made clear to delegates at the start of the meeting. The conference hashtag of #VMSG20XX should be used. The VMSG committee can help and offer advice with respect to social media and other advertising.

There is a consensus that since much novel and cutting-edge research is presented, there should be no photographing, recording or dissemination (e.g., through social media) of delegates' work unless expressly agreed.

## 14. Progressive Changes to the Format of VMSG Conferences

VMSG recently conducted a members' survey to find out how we could best serve the community. Here are just a few suggestions regarding the Annual VMSG meeting that emerged from this:

- Contemplate having debate-oriented sessions
- Have themes focussed on current research developments

We also recognise that there are major changes taking place in the way that conferences are held and there is an increasing desire for remote participation and online presentations. For this to work, it requires an appropriate IT infrastructure that may not yet be available at all venues.

## 15. Post-VMSG Conference Report

Finally, VMSG is required to write annual reports for both the *Mineralogical Society* and the *Geological Society of London* that include details of the VMSG Annual Conference. We know that this needs to be written when you'll most likely be feeling exhausted after hosting a large conference, and have other pressing commitments, and so we request just a short (1 side of A4) post-conference report. This might also be used for other purposes, such as showcasing your conference in the VMSG newsletter.