

Common questions and answers about meetings in public

We are pleased that you have taken the time to find out more about how NICE works and how we make decisions.

To help you understand how our meetings held in public are run we have compiled some common questions and answers. We hope you find this information helpful. If you have questions during the course of the meeting please speak to the Meetings in Public Coordinator in the first instance.

Who can be a public observer?

Public observers are those that can come to watch a NICE advisory committee or Citizens Council meeting (referred to hereafter as 'committee meeting') but are not directly involved in the business of the meeting. Public observers might include:

- members of the public
- members of the press
- representatives from the pharmaceutical or healthcare industries
- representatives from patient, carer and voluntary sector organisations

How can I register to attend a committee meeting?

You can register on the NICE website to attend a meeting up to 20 working days before it takes place. Registration will usually close 10 days before the meeting takes place. Up to 20 places will be available, depending on the size of the venue. Where meetings are oversubscribed NICE may need to limit the number of places we can offer.

We are unable to reserve or block book places to observe committee meetings. Please complete the on-line registration form on the NICE website to request to observe a particular meeting. Please note that it may not be possible to accept late registration requests.

Once registration has closed, NICE will contact applicants via email to let them know whether they have a place at the meeting. The invitation will include a map of the meeting venue and general information about meetings in public. The final agenda will be on the website at least a day before the meeting.

Can public observers take part in the committee meeting?

People who come to watch a committee meeting are there only as public observers. As a public observer, you will be able to listen to the business of the meeting, except when confidential information is being discussed (see 'Will I be able to listen to all the discussions?' below for more details). However, you will not be able to participate in the committee's discussions. So you won't be able to ask questions, take part in voting or put your own views to the members of the committee.

If I have any questions, who should I talk to?

The Meetings in Public Coordinator will welcome the public observers as they arrive for the meeting. They will do their best to help you with practical questions about the running of the meeting and the facilities available, such as where you may purchase refreshments. If they are unable to answer your question they may refer you to another member of the NICE team.

Please remember that we cannot discuss the evidence considered or the outcome of the meeting with public observers.

How will the committee meeting run?

At the start of the meeting the committee chair will introduce him or herself. The following items are usually discussed during the public part of the meeting:

- The agenda for the day.
- The minutes of the last meeting.
- Whether any committee member has a conflict of interest they need to declare (declarations are taken at the start of each topic discussion as more than one topic may be discussed at each meeting).

- Whether the meeting will be held in two parts. Part 1 is open to public observers. Part 2 will be closed to the public observers (see 'Will I be able to listen to all the discussions?').

The chair will then move on to the business of the meeting.

There may be occasions when a meeting is entirely closed to public observers. This is because the chair has decided that it will not be possible to conduct any business without referring to confidential information.

Who will be at the committee meeting?

In addition to the committee chair and committee members, the following people may be present at Committee meetings:

- members of NICE staff involved in running the meeting and supporting the committee and external experts
- patient or lay experts, and clinical or technical experts
- manufacturer representatives
- meeting facilitators (Citizens Council only)

What will the committee talk about?

Depending on which meeting you are observing and the stage of the development process for the topic being discussed, the committee may:

- hear from experts about the topic they are considering, these might be patients or lay experts, or clinical or technical experts
- hear from representatives of the manufacturer or sponsor, who will comment on any matters of factual accuracy on the topic they are considering
- discuss and make recommendations based on the evidence that is presented to them, including information received from registered stakeholders
- discuss how they will develop draft recommendations for consultation
- discuss comments from the stakeholder consultation .

Will papers be provided for public attendees to follow the committee meeting?

A draft agenda for the meeting will normally be available on the NICE website, 20 working days before the meeting. Background information about the topic being discussed can also be found on the NICE website. You are welcome to download these documents and bring them along to the meeting. Copies of the presentation slides shown during Part 1 (open session to the public) will be available on the day of the meeting.

Because other committee papers run to many pages and often contain confidential information (commercial, academic or otherwise), and in some cases information of a personal and sensitive nature, we are not able to provide these for public observers.

How can I keep up to date on details of the committee meeting?

If the meeting time or location has to be moved, due to unforeseen circumstances, we will endeavour to update our website as soon as possible and contact, via email, those who have registered to attend. We advise that you check the NICE website and your emails up to the day before the meeting to make sure you have the most up to date agenda, and information about the start time and venue.

Do I need to let you know if I am no longer able to attend a committee meeting I have registered to observe?

Yes. Please inform the Meetings in Public coordinator as soon as possible if you are unable to attend the meeting. There are a limited number of places available to observe NICE committee meetings, and by sending your apologies early, other registrants could be given the opportunity to observe. This will also help us ensure appropriate NICE staff is informed of any required arrangements.

Will I be able to listen to all the discussions?

It depends on whether some of the information the committee needs to discuss is confidential. If it is, then all public observers will be asked to leave the room while these discussions take place (this is called part 2 of the meeting).

Information classed as confidential includes confidential academic or policy work, patients' and lay experts' personal testimonies (if this is what the patient or lay expert has requested) and information that is called 'commercial in confidence'. This means that public disclosure of this information could have an impact on the commercial interests of the particular company or the academic interests of a research or professional organisation, or the policy interest of the government.

Will a decision about the topic be made at the committee meeting?

If the decision needs to be based on confidential information, for example, 'commercial in confidence' or 'academic in confidence' information, it will always be made in the closed Part 2 meeting. For example, decisions on the recommendations at a technology appraisal committee meeting will always take place in the closed part 2 meeting because they are usually commercially confidential.

Depending on the topic being discussed and the stage of the process, the committee's draft decision and recommendations will be published on the NICE website following the meeting. Again, depending on the topic being discussed and the stage of the process, the draft decision and recommendations may also be open to public consultation. You can find out more about the different processes for each type of guidance or topic area on our website at www.nice.org.uk

It is important to remember that the committee is independent and advisory, its draft decisions and recommendations to NICE do not represent final NICE guidance. These may change as a result of public consultation.

There may be occasions when the committee decides it cannot make any draft decisions or recommendations because the evidence it has seen and heard is insufficient or requires further work or assessment. If this happens the chair will indicate what the committee requires to enable it to make a draft decision or recommendation. The next steps will be agreed outside the meeting and we will update our website with further information as soon as possible.

How long will it take to discuss each topic?

Committee meetings vary in length depending on the topics being discussed. This makes it difficult to predict how long it will take to discuss each topic and when a meeting will end. The chair will outline the agenda for the day at the start of the meeting, and may give an indication of when certain topics will be discussed.

It is important that all public observers arrive promptly to ensure you receive the required briefing prior to the meeting. Committee meetings will not be delayed for late arrivals. To keep disruptions to a minimum, late arrivals may not be allowed into the meeting until there is a suitable break.

Do I have to stay for the entire committee meeting?

No, but to keep disruptions to a minimum we ask that where possible public observers leave meetings during a suitable break.

What facilities do you have to accommodate people with disabilities?

NICE buildings comply with legislation on accessibility for people with disabilities. Committee meeting rooms at NICE are fitted with an induction loop for people with hearing impairment, but please let us know in advance if you will need to use it.

There is direct access from the street for wheelchair users. However, we do have limits on the number of people with mobility problems that we can accommodate. These limits are set by the fire service because in the case of a fire or security alert the lifts do not operate, and there are stairs to the NICE

offices. If you are a wheelchair user or have walking difficulties, please contact the Meetings in Public Coordinator so that we can ensure appropriate support is in place. Please also note that no parking is available at either Spring Gardens in London or at City Tower in Manchester and parking bays in the street are metered (that is, need to be paid for) and time limited.

Please note if the committee meeting is held at a different venue than one of the NICE offices we will ensure that the meeting venue complies with legislation on accessibility for people with disabilities. Access information will be provided when confirming your place.

Please contact the Meetings in Public Coordinator if you have any other specific accessibility requirements that you would like to tell us about before the meeting.

Will refreshments be provided for public observers?

Light refreshments, in the form of tea, coffee and water, will be provided for public observers at committee meetings. During the lunch break public observers can leave the meeting venue to purchase lunch from a café or shops in the area. Some meetings venues will allow food to be brought into the premises. Where this is permitted, this will be stated in your confirmation letter.

Can I record and take notes at the committee meeting?

Audio or video recording, live reporting and photographing, of committee meetings is not allowed by public observers. If a public observer is found to be recording a meeting they will be asked to leave.

Committee meeting minutes will be published in draft form on the NICE website about 20 working days after the meeting.

Can I quote what is said at a committee meeting?

When meetings are held in public, the committee will debate the evidence thoroughly and will express a range of views. Any quotations for external publication are limited to the final summary, which is usually provided by the

committee chair and relevant NICE spokespeople. You may not quote what is said by any person or group present at a committee meeting directly or indirectly (for example, attribute the quote to an unnamed committee member or NICE team) unless NICE provides explicit approval and the relevant person has agreed to be quoted.

It is important to remember that those attending the committee meeting have generously given up their time to attend and participate in these meetings. We want to ensure that they feel able to speak freely in public meetings without concern that they may be misquoted or be quoted out of context. We greatly appreciate your cooperation in this matter.

Can I report what is said at committee meetings without using quotations?

Yes. We are happy for external publications to publish information on the issues discussed at committee meetings as long as they do not attribute the text to an individual or particular group participating in the meeting (e.g. committee member, external experts or NICE team). While, a range of views will be expressed at committee meetings, the draft and final recommendations are agreed by the entire committee. These important decisions could not be reached unless discussions covered the full range of views before making the draft and final recommendations.

Can I report what is said at committee meetings via social media?

Live reporting of committee meeting proceedings is not allowed during the meeting by public observers. If a public observer is found to be broadcasting the proceedings via any media during the meeting they will be asked to leave.

What can I report after the committee meeting?

Please be aware in the interest of context that the committee members will debate the evidence thoroughly and will express a range of views during the course of the meeting. Any quotations for external publication are limited to

the final summary, which is usually provided by the committee chair and relevant NICE spokespeople. You may not quote what is said by any person present at a committee meeting directly or indirectly (for example, attribute the quote to an unnamed committee member) unless NICE provides explicit approval and the relevant person has agreed to be quoted.

Can I talk to members of the committee during the breaks?

We ask public observers to address any questions they have to the Meetings in Public Coordinator.

The role of committee members is to make an independent assessment of the evidence. It is therefore very important that no one tries to influence an individual committee member's view during the meeting, the breaks or outside the meeting on any topics that are under discussion by NICE.

Requests for media interviews should be made through the NICE press office. Any other requests will automatically be refused. Media interviews with NICE staff or committee members are unlikely to take place immediately after the meeting, due to previously booked travel arrangements. However, the NICE press office will endeavour to identify a time and venue to suit both parties at a later date. Interviews with external experts should be conducted away from NICE premises.

Can I talk to the external experts who present evidence to the committee meeting?

Again, we ask public observers to address any questions they have to the Meetings in Public Coordinator in the first instance rather than approach the external experts directly.

The external experts are volunteering their time to attend committee meetings. They have to spend time preparing what they are going to say to the committee and are very focused on the business in hand. In addition, patient experts, lay members and service users can find meetings stressful as they disclose their personal experience of a particular illness or condition. The role of the experts is to give the committee their personal view about an illness or

condition and the treatment or intervention being considered and it is important that no one tries to influence an individual expert.

Can I conduct a research study on the committee meeting and/or NICE?

If you have registered to observe a meeting, and also wish to conduct a study on the committee meeting and/or NICE processes, please contact NICE Enquiry Handling by email nice@nice.org.uk You will need to provide details on the purpose and context of your study, the information you plan to gather during the meeting, and a request for the committees consent. This information will then be passed to the relevant NICE project team who will assess your proposal and contact the relevant committee members and other attendees to obtain informed consent if needed. You will be informed of NICE's decision by email. If it is not possible for you to conduct your research study you will still be able to observe the meeting however, you will not be allowed to conduct any research at the meeting. If you no longer wish to observe the meeting, please inform the Meetings in Public coordinator as soon as possible, to allow your place to be offered to another registrant.

Can children attend committee meetings?

No. To keep disruptions to a minimum, children under the age of 16 cannot attend committee meetings.

What will happen if a public observer tries to disrupt the committee meeting?

We expect that everyone who comes to a meeting will respect the work of the committee and will not cause any disruption. If a public observer causes any disruption, the chair may insist that the individual leaves.

We may also restrict public observers who cause a disruption from attending any future meetings.

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