



Grand Secretary's Office
Mark Masons' Hall
86 St James's Street, London, SW1A 1PL

4 May 2021

To: All Heads of Orders and Secretariat in England, Scotland & Wales
Cc: Members of all Executive Committees

Dear Sir and Brother

Updated guidance on the resumption of Masonic meetings

When I wrote to you last month setting out our resumption strategy, I said I would be in touch again with some updated guidance on recommencing meetings and answers to the most frequently asked questions on this topic.

This note should read in conjunction with my letter of 15 April 2021 and the '*General Guidance for meeting during Covid-19 restrictions*' referred to later.

Meetings can resume from 17 May 2021, but does that mean my Unit has to resume meetings?

No. The decision to allow Masonic activity to resume simply creates the right environment in which individual Units and Masonic Centres can begin their preparations to commence meetings but that will take longer in some cases than in others.

Is the virtual business meeting scheme still available to Units who are unable to resume meetings?

Yes. The scheme remains in place and will be kept under review to assess its continuing usefulness.

Does my Unit need permission to start physical meetings again?

Yes. Although meetings may resume, local suspensions are in place and it is up to the local Ruler of each Order to decide when they feel the time is right for meetings to resume in their locality.

What ceremonies are Units permitted to work and under what conditions?

Until Step 4 of the Government's roadmap comes into force, only ceremonies to admit Candidates (e.g. Advancement, Elevation, Induction etc.) and Install/Proclaim the Worshipful Master (or equivalent) will be permitted (with the exception of the RCC and AMD as previously notified).

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The “General Guidance for meeting during Covid-19 restrictions” document is available from the “Documents” area of Keystone Online, as is the specific ceremonial guidance for each Order.

These must be adhered to until further notice.

First physical (face-to-face) Meeting

All Units are expected to hold an Installation/Proclamation Ceremony at their first physical (face-to-face) meeting following the recommencement of Masonic meetings. This is an opportunity to ratify any decision for a Master (or equivalent) to stay in the Chair for a further term, or to elect someone else so as not to further disadvantage those already progressing within the Unit. This is a particular consideration where the date of Installation may have an impact on eligibility for Provincial/Grand Rank or equivalent.

If the decision is taken to change the Master (or equivalent) but the term he would serve would be considerably shorter than 12 months - because of the proximity to the next regular Installation meeting - it should be emphasised that there is an expectation that he would then be Proclaimed for a further term at the next regular Installation meeting, for him to enjoy a full calendar year of meetings.

If it has not been possible to elect the Master (or equivalent) or the election ballot was held more than 12 months ago, you can elect and Install at the same meeting by using the Elect and Install Dispensation facility on Keystone Online.

Dispensation for third year in the Chair

The period of Mastership is calculated from one physical (face-to-face) Installation/Proclamation Ceremony to the next, which may well be more than 12 calendar months under current circumstances.

A Dispensation for a third consecutive year in the Chair is only required where the serving Master (or equivalent) has been regularly Installed at a face-to-face meeting, proclaimed for a second consecutive year at another face-to-face meeting, and now awaits proclamation for a further, third, year.

The Dispensation for a third term will be free of charge provided the need is due to Covid related circumstances.

Regular or Emergency Meeting

At an emergency meeting it is only permissible to conduct the business precisely listed on the agenda (e.g. there is no accommodation for items such as ‘any other business’) and such agenda items cannot include anything that the Constitutions & Regulations state must be carried out at a regular meeting.

In many cases, it may be more practical to postpone a regular meeting instead by Dispensation from the Province/District/Division. (The restriction on the timeframe for postponing a regular meeting specified in the Constitutions & Regulations having been removed due to the ‘special circumstances’ of Covid-19).

If using the postponed meeting option, that meeting may only be a postponement of the last scheduled regular meeting, as specified in the By-Laws, and it must be held prior to the next regular meeting.

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If a Virtual Business Meeting (VBM) was held in lieu of that last scheduled regular meeting, then it would not be permissible to include any business already transacted at that VBM.

Stale Ballots

Any ballot conducted more than twelve months ago is considered 'stale' and should not be relied upon. Where this is the case, the ballot should be taken again in the usual way *before* the admission of candidates, joining/re-joining members, or the installation of a Master (or equivalent).

Festive Boards

The guidance on dining in groups of no more than 6 is in accordance with the Government's rules for restaurants and other hospitality venues.

We have not had sight of the full breakdown of regulations which are expected to come into force on 17 May, but we expect that, with the restrictions we have been familiar with in the past, it would still be unwise to allow formal festive boards to take place.

Brethren are asked to dine as if they were in a restaurant environment and refrain from wine taking, toasts, speeches, and singing, until further notice. Similarly, no procession into or out of the dining room are permitted.

On entering the dining room, you should take your seat immediately and follow the guidance of the premises regarding moving around to use the facilities etc. We hope a more familiar Masonic dining structure to resume when Step 4 of the Government's roadmap comes into force.

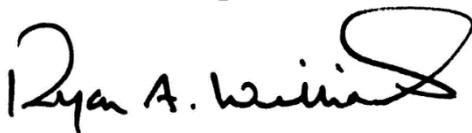
Remember...

No Brother should feel compelled to resume attending Masonic meetings until he feels that the time and circumstances are right for him. Sufficient measures will remain in place to enable Units to continue meeting virtually if face-to-face meetings cannot begin until later in the year.

Subject to the government's roadmap to exit lockdown in England (and the similar plans of the devolved nations) remaining on track, we have sure grounds for optimism about a safe resumption of meetings, but we must remain vigilant to ensure that all necessary measures are taken to minimise the risk of infection.

Announcements about progress with the roadmap in England and the other devolved nations I expected later this month following which I will issue a further update to our existing guidance.

With fraternal regards and best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan A. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

R.W.Bro. Ryan A Williams, P.G.J.W.
Grand Secretary