

HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT POLICY AND METHODS REVIEW REFERENCE COMMITTEE PRINCIPLES REGARDING CONFERENCE AND SEMINAR PARTICIPATION

The Health Technology Assessment Policy and Methods Review (HTA Review) Reference Committee has agreed the following principles for how it will participate in conferences and other public forums.

The Reference Committee has agreed that it will be beneficial for its members to attend and accept invitations to conferences and other public forums on topics that are relevant to the HTA Review. Such forums are an important opportunity to hear discussion and debate about particular HTA issues from individuals and organisations who have an interest in the HTA Review.

The Reference Committee has agreed that when participating in these forums, its members should be, and be seen to be, entirely objective in the conduct of the HTA Review, and not be inappropriately subject to influence from stakeholders who have an interest in the outcome of the Review.

The Reference Committee appreciates that these forums will often involve stakeholders (including those in sponsoring roles) who have an interest in the outcomes of the Review¹, can involve media coverage, and can involve Reference Committee members being asked pointed questions about positions related to the Review in a public setting.

The Reference Committee has agreed the principles below on how to manage its probity obligations in connection with attendance and participation in conferences, seminars and other knowledge sharing and gathering forums.

1. Accepting Invitations and Participation in Conferences, Seminars and Similar Forums

Attendance at conferences, seminars and similar forums is a common part of the marketplace in which the HTA Review is taking place. Attendance can be important for relevant information gathering, personal development, as well as maintenance of important professional networks. Such attendance can be specifically useful in the context of the HTA Review, as well as more broadly relevant to a Reference Committee member.

There can be a number of risks to attendance at such forums:

- (a) Reference Committee members may be asked to make comment about matters that are inconsistent with their confidentiality obligations
- (b) Reference Committee members may be seen as endorsing certain bodies (such as conference sponsors or organisers) that may be seen as having an interest in the outcomes of the HTA Review.

¹ Stakeholders can have a range of interests in the outcomes of the HTA Review, and this spectrum brings different risks. Pharmaceutical companies (for example), that may experience financial implications depending on the outcomes of the HTA Review, arguably bring a higher perceived risk to the HTA Review, compared to (for example) academics who have a professional interest in the outcomes of the HTA Review.

The Reference Committee considers these risks can be managed to a reasonable level as set out in this document.

These risks are higher for forums that are funded by, managed by, and overtly branded by organisations that have an interest in the outcome of the HTA Review. In those instances, there may be a perception that attendance could result in an “influence” by the sponsoring organisation, which could impact the perceived objectivity of Reference Committee members.

In all such instances of conference participation, Reference Committee members will use their judgement, be conservative in terms of protecting the real and perceived integrity of the HTA Review and consult with the Reference Committee Chair and/or the Secretariat and/or the probity adviser if appropriate.

Whenever accepting invitations and participating in such conferences in a personal capacity, the Reference Committee members will be clear and overt that their attendance is in a personal capacity or on behalf of another organisation and that they are not representing the Reference Committee.

2. What Can Reference Committee Members Say at Conferences, Seminars and Similar Forums?

Reference Committee members will discuss and state publicly available information about the HTA Review where appropriate, as well as any statements or messages that the Chair or the whole Committee has authorised to be included in statements. In engaging in such forums, Reference Committee members will assume that any statements made may become public and may be attributed to the whole Committee. Accordingly, the Reference Committee has agreed its members will NOT disclose areas of focus, interim findings, details of Reference Committee discussions or processes that the Committee is going through, unless they are already public or have been authorised by the Chair or the Committee.

Reference Committee members can express personal positions or positions in relation to a members’ organisation on matters relevant to the Review, but they must be clear and unequivocal that the positions being expressed are not those of the broader Reference Committee. The Reference Committee acknowledges positions taken publicly on matters related to HTA may be perceived (rightly or wrongly) as positions of the Reference Committee or the HTA Review more broadly. Reference Committee members will avoid taking positions where possible or will clearly preface any statements by advising that those statements are personal statements or statements that represent the view of another organisation and do not represent the views or conclusions of the HTA Review or the Reference Committee.

The Reference Committee has agreed that any positions expressed must not pertain to deliberative matters of the Reference Committee.

3. Responding to Questions Relating to Positions of the Reference Committee

The matters noted in response to question 2 above equally apply to question 3.

Reference Committee members will be especially careful to avoid making, or being seen to make comments on behalf of the Reference Committee. For example by

avoiding making comment, or providing information other than information that is publicly available.

The Reference Committee acknowledges that its members may be put into positions where comments may be misinterpreted. For that reason, when members agree to attend conferences, forums and seminars, they will be clear with organisers up front that they will not be making public statements about the HTA Review beyond information that is already in the public domain.

4. Reporting back to the Reference Committee after attendance at conferences or similar forums

Reference Committee members will report back to the Reference Committee (which may be written, verbal or via the Secretariat) following any attendance at a conference, seminar or other forum where the content or the organiser may be relevant to the HTA Review. That reporting will include:

- Matters regarding the HTA Review, or HTA policy and methods, learned or discussed that may be of relevance to the HTA Review
- Any engagement with stakeholders that may be of relevance to the HTA Review
- Any engagements or issues which may create criticism or exposure to the HTA Review.

5. Should Reference Committee members accept any hospitality or engage in any social functions that may be seen as paid for by stakeholders?

Engagement in funded social functions associated with conferences and seminars is a common area where perception of influence can be levelled at Reference Committee members.

Reference Committee members will avoid any actual or perceived receipt of any financial or non-financial benefit from stakeholders who may have an interest in the outcomes of the HTA Review. It is recognised that from time to time, avoidance of such circumstances may not be possible. In such instances, Reference Committee members will use their judgement to avoid the potential for actual or perceived conflict of interest, and will inform the Committee as soon as possible of any instances where such benefit was received by the member.

Specifically, this relates to:

- Not attending functions organised and funded by stakeholders with an interest in the outcomes of the HTA Review. (This does not include professional body functions or functions organised by a professional conference organiser, even where stakeholders are a supporter or sponsor of the event).
- Refusing receipt of gifts, meals, hospitality or other events (over a nominal value) from any stakeholders with an interest in the outcomes of the HTA Review through a conference or seminar.
- Not attending side-functions to conferences that are organised and funded by stakeholders with an interest in the outcomes of the HTA Review.
- Not receiving awards or presentations from stakeholders with an interest in the outcomes of the HTA Review.

- Not accepting funding, travel or subsistence support or “free” tickets for attendance at conferences, seminars or functions (that would not be available to the majority of participants).