

# The BRM debate

*making the most of your say*



Royal  
Pharmaceutical  
Society  
of Great Britain

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# 1

## What is a Branch motion for?

### i. Opportunity for debate

Branch motions and the debate on them at the Branch Representatives' Meeting (BRM) are a valuable way for Branches to talk about and publicise their concerns and views to their fellow Branches, to the Council and to the membership at large. An effective Branch motion can stimulate an eye-opening, enjoyable or even controversial debate at the BRM. A motion can help the Council focus on a particular issue of concern and can result in the Council adopting a course of action in response.

### ii. Topics

Motions can be on any topic, although most tend to be on health and social care issues and on pharmacy in particular. However, the profession is developing broad horizons and motions can address any aspect of public policy, politics or indeed any topical issue.

### iii. Motions and the Council

All motions to the BRM are considered by the Council. They first go before the Council in advance of the BRM so that the Council can agree any background information that would be of benefit for the Branches.

- The motions that are carried at the BRM (“resolutions”) are then considered either in committees or directorates before going before the Council again for a decision on the action to be taken.
- The Council's responses to resolutions are captured and discussion and actions are tracked through a progress report that is passed back to the Branches and is viewable to all via the Society's website. Even where the Council decides not to take forward a resolution (resolutions of the BRM are advisory but not binding on the Council), the Council will always provide an explanation of its decision.
- The motions are also a useful way of highlighting concerns to the membership through *The Pharmaceutical Journal (PJ)*. In April, the full list of motions is publicised to the membership through *The PJ*. Following the BRM, a progress report is produced showing in which committees the resolutions have been discussed, setting out the Council's response to them and tracking the actions that have been taken.

# 2

## What makes for a good motion?

The BRM follows a traditional adversarial debating format, with motions proposed, seconded, spoken against, spoken to, summed up and voted on. Further guidance on the art of successful debate is provided as Appendix A. The BRM is a forum for members to bring issues that concern their Branch to the notice of the Council and the membership. Many such motions may well attract general support at the BRM and attract little opposing debate and be overwhelmingly passed. However, for the purposes of ensuring a lively and stimulating BRM, it is helpful if some of the motions on the day contain genuinely debatable points so that controversial, entertaining and informative points of view can be exchanged.

# 3

## Developing a Branch motion

The process of formulating the BRM motions is a good opportunity to engage Branch members in thinking about the range of current issues. Branches may wish to establish an ongoing process to develop and discuss ideas as part of Branch meetings throughout the year. Holding “mini-debates” within the Branch as a way of identifying the topics to go forward is in itself a valuable exercise as it helps raise awareness of current affairs and helps Branch members feel a sense of ownership of their Branch motion. We recommend circulating some ideas prior to the meeting to stimulate debate. Key sources of information include:

- The membership team, who can provide a list of key issues on the Council’s agenda
- The Society’s website at [www.rpsgb.org](http://www.rpsgb.org) for the current developments in the profession and the organisation
- *The PJ* [www.pharmj.com](http://www.pharmj.com) and other pharmacy press for topical issues affecting the profession
- The Westminster Parliament for topical debates and issues on health and social affairs [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)
- The Scottish Parliament, for the latest news from Scotland [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)
- The Welsh Assembly, for the latest news from Wales [www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)
- The All-Party Pharmacy Group in the Westminster Parliament for recent discussion papers [www.appg.org.uk](http://www.appg.org.uk)
- BBC news online [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) and other media which give links to all manner of websites of interest
- Political insider weblogs, including Guido Fawkes – [www.order-order.com](http://www.order-order.com) and *Recess Monkey* – [www.recessmonkey.com](http://www.recessmonkey.com)

It’s a good idea to invite members who can’t attend the meeting to submit ideas for Branch motions so that they can input into the debate. You might also wish to add some different views to your meetings by inviting Members of the Society’s Council and staff, representatives from other pharmacy bodies, other health professions or patients groups to your meetings.

### CHECKLIST

- Give yourself plenty of time to gather your members’ views
- Think out of the box about topics that can create a good debate
- Know the timescale for submissions (**see page 3**)
- Remember: each Branch can submit two motions each year
- Branch motions that have been lost must wait for two years before being resubmitted

# 4

## Formulating a Branch motion

The objective should be clear, whether you wish to highlight an issue of concern or ask the Council to act on something.

Where possible, the objectives of the motion should be **SMART**

**Specific** – motions should specify what they want to achieve.

**Measurable** – you should be able to identify when your objective has been met.

**Achievable** – are the objectives you set achievable and attainable?

**Realistic** – are there the resources to do what you want?

**Timely** – when do you want to achieve the set objectives?

The explanatory paragraph should provide the facts and views to support the motion. It should explain in more detail why the Branch is submitting the motion and the outcomes that the Branch would like to achieve. By all means, be controversial but do ensure that your motion is factually accurate, avoids personal attacks and lends itself to a constructive outcome. If you are calling on the Council to act, you need to be sure that the objective is within the Society's remit. You might want to consider focusing at least one of your motions on the wider public policy agenda, with a contentious proposal or controversial issues at its heart that will stimulate real debate.

### CHECKLIST

- Have a clear objective
- Set out the facts of the matter
- Try for a maximum of 300 words including the explanatory paragraph
- Use plain English [www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk)
- Consider using one motion as a mechanism to stimulate debate on a topical or contentious issue

# 5

## Submitting a Branch motion

The timetable for Branch motions is as follows:

- Branch motions can be accepted from September up until the following 12 February.
- Branches will receive several reminders about the submission dates for Branch motions.
- All submitted Branch motions will be acknowledged by the Membership Unit.
- Emergency motions to the BRM can be accepted up until 30 April at the discretion of the Council. An emergency motion should raise an urgent matter that has arisen after the 12 February deadline. The Secretary and Registrar, on behalf of the Council, will decide if a Branch motion can be accepted under the emergency rule.

Branch motions can be submitted using the online form or by downloading the form from [www.rpsgb.org](http://www.rpsgb.org)

Email to [b&a@rpsgb.org](mailto:b&a@rpsgb.org)

Post to Membership Officer  
RPSGB  
1 Lambeth High Street  
London SE1 7JN

When motions have been received, the Membership Team works through them to ensure that the Branch's intentions are clear and to identify any factors that might prevent clear communication. Where a potential issue around clarity, factual accuracy or duplication has been identified, the Branch Secretary will be contacted via email or telephone. The Membership Team may suggest to the Branch Secretary possible changes to the motion or, in the case of more than one motion being received on the same issue, invite the Branches to merge motions.

In April, the Branch will receive the full list of motions to the BRM. The Branch may wish to meet in order to mandate its representatives to the BRM with its views on the motions.

## 6

### **BRM Rules of Procedure**

The Rules of Procedures for the BRM are available on the Branch and Region pages of the RPSGB website at [www.rpsgb.org/members/society/Branch.html](http://www.rpsgb.org/members/society/Branch.html).

Rule 9 says: "After a motion has been moved and seconded, the Chairman will ask if anyone wishes to speak against the motion. If not, the motion will be put to the meeting without debate. If there is an intervention against adoption of the motion, then a debate on the motion will take place."

The rule is intended to allow the meeting to use time productively but can have the effect of actually preventing some strongly-felt motions from being debated. Occasionally, a Branch representative asks the BRM to vote to rescind rule 9 in order to ensure that all motions are debated, irrespective of whether there is any delegate to speak against the Branch motion.

## 7

### **Practicalities of the BRM**

The mover and seconder of a motion carry the Branch mandate and, of course, need to be well-briefed. The mover of the motion has five minutes to set out the facts of the matter, key background information about the motion and insight into the Branch's viewpoint. It is useful for the mover to have prepared his or her presentation and to have rehearsed it so that it can be successfully delivered within the allocated time.

There are two options for seconding a motion:

- The seconder can speak for up to three minutes in support of the motion. He or she will want to co-ordinate his or her presentation so that it dovetails with, or covers different points from, the mover's speech.
- Where all the points have been adequately covered in the mover's speech, the seconder can opt to "formally second" the motion without any further speech. However, most seconders will want to take the opportunity to add weight to their motion's case.

Movers and seconders will also need to take a view on any amendments to their Branch's motion proposed on the day. If the mover, on behalf of the Branch, is not prepared to accept an amendment, the chairman will invite debate and then move to a vote on it. If the vote on the amendment is carried, the newly worded (or "substantive") motion will replace the Branch's original wording.

After the debate, the mover has three minutes to sum up. This provides the opportunity to address any issues that have been raised during the debate.

The motion is then voted on.

# 8

## CHECKLIST

- A mover is allowed a maximum five minutes' speaking time
- A seconder has a maximum of three minutes' speaking time
- Other speakers have a maximum of three minutes' speaking time
- The amber light on microphone indicates that you have one minute left to speak
- The red light means that time is up.

## After the BRM

The resolutions (motions that have been carried) of the BRM are considered either in standing committees or in directorates during June and July. These views are then incorporated into a draft response for the Council to consider at its next meeting. Following debate by the Council and an agreement on the way forward, the report of the Branch resolutions and Council responses are published in *The PJ*. The report is sent to Branch and Regional Secretaries, who provide any comments to the membership team. The report is discussed at the Branch and Regional Secretaries' Meeting in October.

Branch Secretaries also inform their members of the outcome of the Branch motion at the BRM and, if carried, of the Council's response.

During the following year, a progress report on action on resolutions is updated on the Society's website [www.rpsgb.org](http://www.rpsgb.org)

**Good luck with your motions and, remember, the membership team is there to help you!**

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# Appendix A

## Principles of debating

### What is a debate?

The definition of a debate is a statement of contrasting arguments and ideas.

### The structure of a debate

For a debate to take place, there must be two sides, the proposition and the opposition. Each speaker gives one speech only (except the mover, who gets the opportunity to sum up).

### Definition

Definitions are very important to clarify the proposition and the proposed remedy. The mover of the motion must define the parameters and scope of the whole debate. A useful way of viewing a debate is as a specific policy debate between a government and an opposition. The government wishes to implement a policy: the opposition does not. The policy proposal put forward should:

- Identify a problem
- Propose a clear solution
- Explain the outcomes of the solution that is proposed.

An alternative view of viewing the proposal is to ask a series of questions:

- What policy is needed?
- Why should this policy be pursued?
- How will the policy be pursued?

### Arguments for

After you have identified the problem, the solution should incorporate a mechanism to solve the problem. An argument needs to be proposed in favour of the solution.

- Arguments should be relevant and linked to a conclusion, not just to the general area of the motion. They should make logical sense and be fully explained and justified with accurate and relevant evidence.
- Any part of the argument which is controversial has to be argued for; otherwise it is an easy target for those opposed to it to argue against it very easily. Arguments should be appealing and compelling.
- All these things combined will make a motion persuasive and will convince others that what you are saying is right.
- It is important that the mover and the seconder of the Branch motion are clear on who is saying what and that any repetition is avoided.

### Arguments against

Opposition to a Branch motion should be in a similar manner but focus on the opposite direction. Arguments against should demonstrate for example:

- Unintended negative consequences
- Goes against a principle which ought to be preserved
- A precedent has been tried before and has failed; you need to demonstrate evidence of this to give weight to your argument
- The motion is unworkable or unenforceable, even if it is desirable in principle.

## **Rebuttal**

Rebuttal is a response to the claims and arguments made by the other side against a motion. This is an opportunity to show that the other side is wrong in what they are saying, independent of the substantive arguments you want to make to prove that a motion is right and should be carried. A good way of distinguishing between a rebuttal and argument is to say that rebuttal is destructive, while arguments are constructive. The arguments against your Branch motion can be rebutted, for example, by demonstrating that what is being said is untrue, based on flawed evidence or that the facts that are being used do not lead to the conclusion they want.

Key issues to remember when taking part in any debate:

- What has been said in the debate so far?
- What has not yet been said in the debate so far?
- What still needs to be said to persuade the meeting to vote for or against the motion?

## **Summing up**

The summing up by the mover:

- Should have a clear structure
- Explain clearly all the main arguments for and against the motion
- Rephrase the arguments for the motion to make them even more persuasive
- Clarify any arguments that have become confused during the debate
- Address the main arguments against the motion and demonstrate why these are wrong.