VIRTUAL EVENTS

A best practice guide for running virtual events at UoR

This best practice guide is designed as a starting point for any School or Function considering running a virtual event.

1. Set your aims and objectives

Start by working out what you are trying to achieve with the event and the needs of the participants before you choose which platform to use. Always consider if an event is the best way to achieve your aims.

2. Consider audience and timing

- As with in-person events, your audience will dictate your content choice, how you promote your event and possibly even which platform you use.
- Remember that you may have participants signing in from different time zones. Do ensure you pick an event time that is suitable for your audience.

3. Decide which platform will best support your goals

The University currently supports the use of Blackboard Collaborate, Microsoft Teams Live Events and Microsoft Teams as virtual platforms. Which one you use will depend on the aims and objectives of your event. We have listed some of the features of each platform below:

Microsoft Teams Meetings	
Best used for: - Smaller, informal events - Events where you want the audience to be able to join in the conversation	Features: - Free to use & available to all University staff & students. - Easily allows external guests to join (can be managed through the lobby feature if required). - Whiteboard. - Breakout functionality. - Automatic closed captions. - Can record the meeting. - Max capacity of 250 attendees.

Microsoft Teams Live Events	
Best used for: • Any virtual event • Capacity of up to 10,000 participants	Features: • Free to use. • Extension of Teams, so all staff have access. • Only one person on screen at one time. • Live automatic captioning. • Participants are anonymous. • Less participant interactivity – Q&A chat functionality. • Support is available through DTS.
Blackboard Collaborate	
Best used for: • Events where more interaction is planned, i.e., polls, discussion, chat etc. • Capacity of up to 250 participants	Features: • Free to use. • Part of Blackboard, so all Blackboard users have access. • Non-Blackboard users can be invited as guest participants. • A wider range of participant interactivity is possible. • No automatic captioning. • Max. 250 participants if you are planning to use chat functionality. Without chat functionality, you can have a max. of 500 participants. • Support is available through TEL (for teaching and learning-related events). • Self-access guides are available through TEL.

We recommend that you use one of the above platforms based on the needs of your virtual event. These platforms are approved for use by IMPS and are GDPR compliant. Other online platforms that are widely available, however, if you choose to explore these you must consider ethics, privacy and safeguarding in relation to that platform. You should be wary of signing participants up to platforms that might retain or use their data in unethical ways. Before using any online platform, outside of those listed above, you should check with IMPS that it is ok to do so.

4. Ensure you have enough resources in place

Trying to facilitate, present and manage the technicalities of a virtual event is difficult – so splitting the roles really helps – with a 'presenter/facilitator' and 'technical support/producer' working hand in hand.

5. Draw up an event programme and consider what content you will include

• Take a participant experience-led approach to the planning of the format - put yourself in their shoes!

- Ensure have an agenda and running order in place. Structure and content are just as important for virtual events as in-person events.
- Will your event be live, pre-recorded or will it have elements of both?
- Your programme/format may dictate what platform you use.
- Examples of formats include lecture, Q&A, debate, panel, quiz, and breakout.
- Remember that audience attention spans tend to be shorter for online events – you may need to include breaks and interactivity to keep your audience engaged.
- Don't try and cram too many different elements into one virtual event as it will give a muddled message and will dilute what you are trying to achieve.
- Don't just transfer activity to the digital realm, think about what the digital can do for you - it's an opportunity to get creative.

6. Promoting your event
- Remember to start your event promotion and/or send out your invitations in plenty of time, as there is still much competition for people's time online.
- Decide which promotional channels will best reach your audience. Is your event public facing or are you targeting a specific audience?
- Remember to utilise your speaker's networks.

7. Communicating with participants
- As with in-person events, it is important to collect RSVPs so that you have an idea of numbers and accessibility considerations. You can use something as simple as Microsoft Forms as a registration page.
- Ensure you provide participants with clear joining instructions before the event.
- Remember to manage expectations if transferring a popular in-person event to an online format.

8. Accessibility considerations
Make sure you know what the needs of your participants are and put in place appropriate ways to engage them. For example, using closed captioning or providing transcripts. Please refer to the TEL web pages on accessibility and inclusivity for further information.

9. Arrange a rehearsal
- Invite all speakers/presenters to a rehearsal. Ensure you consider timing, flow, and content.
- Make sure moderators and technical staff are also in attendance.
- Anticipate potential issues on the day i.e., technical issues, staff illness etc. and what you will do to resolve them.

10.   Plan your post-event follow up
- Follow up your event with an email to participants thanking them for attending.
- Make sure to post any event highlights on social media.
- Consider how you will collect feedback and review what options may be available to you within platforms i.e., voting, commenting etc.

- Maximise the usability of your event content i.e., sharing your recording (as long as this is GDPR compliant), or repurposing your materials.

11. Requirements

- **Approval:** Event notification is not required for virtual events.
- **Access:** Microsoft Teams and Blackboard Collaborate are available to all staff, however, Microsoft Teams Live Events requires license allocation from DTS.
- **Training:** We strongly advise that those who aren't familiar with the various platforms spend time reviewing the Teams Live Events and Blackboard Collaborate Training Portals for demos and user guides before planning an event.
- **Privacy & Safeguarding:**
  - Recording – if your attendees are participating (camera/mic/chat) then you must make them aware that the event is being recorded and where it will be made available for GDPR purposes.
  - Code of conduct – we recommend that you have a code of conduct specifying what behavior is not acceptable and what the consequences will be for inappropriate behavior. You should have a process in place for inappropriate behavior, i.e., removing the attendee from the meeting. We recommend that you have a Q&A moderator for your event.
  - GDPR compliance – ensure that you are handling attendee data in a GDPR-compliant way i.e. specifying exactly what the audience will be signing up for and the comms they are agreeing to, password protecting personal data and deleting it once finished with. If in any doubt, contact IMPS for advice.
- **External speakers:** Remember to review the External Speaker Policy before committing.

12. Toolkit

- Microsoft Teams Training Portal
- Microsoft Teams Live Events Training Portal
- DTS Teams Live Events Support Form
- Requesting an External User Account
- External Speaker Policy
- Virtual Event Programme and Running Order