



Accessible online events and conferences

Introduction

“I am proud of how adaptable UCL colleagues have been over recent months, changing their ways of working to accommodate our new normal of remote working. Many of you will be gearing up to plan events and conferences in this new environment. We need to ensure we don’t unintentionally build in barriers in our practice that exclude disabled colleagues. This guidance will give you some tips on best practice to ensure a positive experience for all event attendee’s.”

Fiona Ryland, Chief Operating Office and Disability Champion

As staff become accustomed to working remotely for the time being, many will start planning events and conferences, with remote attendance of course. It is good to start getting things back on track. However, many staff are still upskilling themselves in the use of technology. UCL must endeavour to provide disability accessible options when organising events and conferences and not forgot the legislative requirement to do so (Equality Act 2010).

Much of this will be as simple as applying a set of polite protocols, that do not require any technical know-how. Others will be ensuring staff use the flexible options available within the applications they are using. A combination of available technology and establishing the right culture will deliver the best results.

This guide is intended to support staff in providing an accessible event/conference experience for all participants, by avoiding creating unnecessary barriers for disabled attendees.

Create the right culture

Provide an access profile on the event page that outlines the accessibility measures that have been put in place for the event and what measures can be available upon

request (BSL interpreters etc.) It is important to note the measures that are not available in this profile also.

Provide content including an agenda with timings and speaker details in advance, ensuring this is an accessible format. This is good practice and helps remove barriers for neurodivergent attendees, those with low vision and other needs. This is the easiest way to enable people to access the content as they can use their own assistive technology to adapt the material for their own needs.

If sharing PowerPoint content, include the notes too so participants can follow along on the day.

Manage expectations e.g. such as telling participants (up front) what you will provide and what you are unable to provide. Avoid using this as an opt-out to inclusion, this is about clarity of detail ahead of an event.

Ask the audience what they need ahead of time and at the outset of the session.

Don't be afraid to make mistakes

Create a culture of (polite) correction

Provide a point of contact (email and number) for attendees to discuss their accessibility requirements with a member of the events team. This is especially important for those who have requirements that are not covered in the access profile provided.

Ensure you follow best practice in creating documents that will be referred to within the event. See resources listed at foot of guidance.

Use the tools available

Use captions. This feature may be built in for audio (but not video) e.g. MS Teams, and PowerPoint but where it is not (Blackboard Collaborate) a speech-to-text reporter will need to be booked. See resources below for booking information. Plan ahead to ensure availability.

When using video cameras, ensure content is captioned, and that you describe the content for those unable to view it.

For better audio, use a headset to cut out background noise and choose one with a microphone, as this will give greater clarity.

Consider tools to enable participation and engagement in different formats such as chat, polls, questions and answers. However you should ensure that these tools are accessible to all participants. If using these options for large events - appoint a moderator to manage responses etc. while the presenter is busy presenting. ISD Digital Media can provide this service when overseeing the production of [MS Teams Live Events](#).

Use Microsoft Accessibility Checker tool for documents created in Word or PowerPoint. Ensure documents are open, unlocked with public access to enable participants to use assistive technology to adapt the text size or formatting.

The event organiser should ensure presenters are made aware of access needs of those attending.

During the event

Inform participants how things will work and how they can participate e.g. through chat, Q&A, virtual hand raising, turn taking, etc

All participants should join the event with their microphone muted and video turned off. If using MS Teams Live Events the ISD Digital Media team will take care of this for you and hold attendees in a 'waiting area'.

Describe all onscreen activity when onscreen tools are used, as some tools may have low contrast and not always be usable with screen readers.

Indicate at start of event if you want questions as the presentation goes along or to be held to the end. Ask participants to say their names before they contribute.

Ensure there are sufficient breaks (5-10 minutes break every 30-40 minutes). Being online for long periods can be exhausting for all, but acutely so for some.

Record the event to enable people to review content afterwards. Blackboard Collaborate can anonymise participants (MS Teams too with ISD facilitation) which may encourage anxious participants to contribute. If recording events using MS Teams, remember to activate auto captioning – the recording will store the captions, and these can be edited for accuracy later.

Ensure the presenter is visible while presenting, even while sharing presentation content – Presenters can be 'pinned' on MS Teams and Zoom This may support lip reading and enable any participants who may find it difficult to track the discussion to get emotional intelligence clues from the presenter's face e.g. this may be helpful to some neurodivergent participants.

When using systems like MS Teams and Zoom remember that your background is important. Choosing a simple background is better than some of the more vivid ones which may cause visual disturbance issues and try to avoid recording yourself sat in front of a TV or anything that is too cluttered. Use an image of UCL for a more official statement, or simply use your home environment for a more personal touch, although when doing this, ensure that there is nothing too revealing.

Advise presenters to avoid having a busy background (use of blurred effect in MS Teams and Zoom can help address this) this helps reduce distractions for the participants and makes it easier for them to follow the presentation. Too much movement on behalf of the presenter can also cause similar issues.

Have a backup plan ready if things don't work as planned, for instance a standby Chair.

Consider the use of break out rooms for quieter space for discussion, bringing people back to share. Teams Live Events does not have a breakout room feature. However, you can create breakout rooms in a standard Teams Meeting.

Describe slides, videos or other visual media when used to enable those with low vision to follow.

Follow up after

It is a good idea to send attendees a link to the recording and other key details following the event. You may want to edit auto-captions before you do this, but be aware this is time consuming! This allows those who need more processing time to catch up and to feedback any additional points.

Other tips and considerations

Speaking slowly and clearly will assist with lip reading and ensure greater accuracy when captions are auto generated.

Don't rush - give all participants time to process the information you are sharing, and be patient. For instance, it is good practice to pause at a new slide, to allow the audience to read it, before you start talking.

Repeat as needed.

Allow time to transition between applications or features. Navigation screen elements are often obscured or hidden making it harder to transition for those with low vision.

Indicate when you have completed your presentation.

Please be mindful that switching tasks (to Q&A or break out rooms) will take time for some attendees. Please be patient and respectful.

If you are using BSL interpreters or speech-to-text reporters, a practice session with presenters is highly recommended.

Further resources

[Creating accessible content](#) advice from ISD

[MS Teams Live Events](#) supported by ISD Digital Media team – fees apply

[Blackboard Ally](#) provides an accessibility score for Moodle content

Captioning services:

[121 Captions](#)

[ClearText.com](#)

UCL Captioning and Translation - tuan-chi.hsieh.13@ucl.ac.uk

[Creating slides](#)

[PowerPoint Accessibility Checker](#)

[Word Accessibility Checker](#)