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Preparing for and running an online event: what we learned from TEdELL2020 *Virtual*

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Preparing, learning and teamwork

We were conscious of the fact that we were beginners at coordinating online conferences. So, we looked online for tips, spoke to the ICT support at the faculty, networked with colleagues via email and also attended a seminar about online events. The seminar website can be found [here](#). We received a lot of support and encouragement from a colleague in Norway, [Susan Nacey](#), which was really important at the beginning, in particular. So, we advise anyone venturing into a virtual event to read around the topic, contact colleagues who have done it already, and ask for help / support.

As conveners we met weekly from September onwards, and shared the responsibilities between us. We learned as we went along with the support of the CETAPS secretaries and the faculty colleagues who agreed to help us out as hosts, or to try out technical approaches we were new to. But doing it together was important. So, try to find a colleague to help you navigate virtual waters.

Conference fees

Going virtual meant fees were cut by 50-60%

	Original F2F fee	Virtual fee
PhD students early bird conference fee	€50	€30
PhD students conference fee	€90	€50
PhD students conference fee + dinner	€140	-
Early bird conference fee	€120	€60
Early bird conference fee + dinner	€170	-
Normal conference fee	€170	€90
Normal conference fee + dinner	€220	-

We were able to give a fee to keynote speakers and will invest in books for the CETAPS library with what we have left in the conference account.

Conference email

This was manned by one of us, rather than a secretary. This we felt was important so we could give more personalised responses to delegates as they registered. We checked the email almost every day from September onwards and endeavoured to respond as soon as possible. This more intimate approach meant we began to create a relationship with delegates before they arrived.

Registration

This was done in a rather an old-fashioned way, requesting an email with proof of payment, name, affiliation and VAT nº. It wasn't very efficient and was extremely time consuming.

In the future we would prepare a form for registration requesting information that included:

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- Name and title
- Affiliation
- Address for invoice
- VAT nº for invoice (if required)
- Country of residence / time zone
- Permission to share name / email
- Permission to record session (link to downloadable form)

Our event was small with most delegates from Europe, but we had to check time zones to ensure that some speakers were scheduled at appropriate times in the day. Having this in the registration form would have made it easier. If delegates come from different time zones, then scheduling will be more difficult, and so having this information as early as possible is useful.

Time zones

We decided to organise the schedule based on UCT / GMT, despite most delegates being in UCT +1. However, there were some confusions with time zones, despite information about this on the website, in the programme, in the schedule and sent in emails. So, in future we would consider making this information even more visible and giving it more emphasis in communications.

Pre-conference information online / in emails

In July we made the decision to go virtual, and so prepared a set of FAQs which went online to help conference delegates with any queries they might have.

The link to this page on the TEdELL2020 website can be found [here](#).

We prepared information for delegates in October, which included:

- tips for conference delegates (on how to prepare for an online event);
- before the conference,
- during the conference,
- information for chairs,
- information for speakers
- information about recordings.

The link to this page on the TEdELL2020 website can be found [here](#).

Conference bags / conference goodies

A virtual event requires no conference bag with goodies, so we tried to put together a selection of goodies which could be emailed. These included discount fliers from publishers, a booklet of Portuguese recipes (prepared with contributions from the scientific committee), a conference programme with bios and abstracts, and a document with links to all the sessions (rather like a conference map). This was sent out a couple of days before the event.

Sponsorship from publishers

We had originally procured sponsorship (Cambridge Assessment English) for some hand-made lanyards through *Bead For Life* [<https://www.beadforlife.org/>]. However, when the decision to go virtual was made, this was no longer necessary. Cambridge Assessment English agreed, instead, to sponsor the live streaming of a concert.

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We contacted the publishers that some of our speakers had published with, to request further sponsorship. As such, Multilingual Matters, Palgrave Macmillan and Routledge agreed to sponsor the event by donating two or three books for raffles and to meet delegates during a couple of coffee break outs. Publishers also provided discount fliers for the conference delegates, which we sent out in an email before the event.

Check in and the raffles

The idea for a raffle emerged from the need to get delegates to check in, so we knew who had been present during the event. We managed to get donations of books from the publishers – a list of the names of delegates who checked in on each day was used for book raffles. The raffles took place after three of the keynote sessions. This worked quite well, and most delegates did check in, although we got some feedback that it was not clear why they needed to do so.

Our CETAPS secretaries manned the check in and collected delegates names, as well as fielded questions and problems.

Checking in, with a view to counting how many participants we had, remained a problem to overcome. We do not know exactly how many people attended the event, as not everyone checked in. For delegates who want participation certificates there needs to be some proof that they attended at least some of the sessions.

Recently we have discovered that it is possible to get attendant lists through Zoom. So, this problem can be overcome. The link with information on how to do this is [here](#).

Schedule / programme

We deliberately scheduled for long breaks between sessions (30 mins). This we hoped would be used for downtime, away from the computer screen, or for socializing / networking online. Online conferences are more exhausting than face-to-face ones, and we didn't want delegates to over-tire. The schedule was very regular, with a 60-minute keynote or a 90-minute panel followed by a 30-minute break or a 90-minute lunch break.

A link to our programme page for the conference can be found [here](#).

Socializing / networking

Socializing / networking included opportunities to meet in previously created **breakout rooms**.

Break out rooms provided the following opportunities:

- **To talk to the Keynote speaker** immediately after their talk. This worked very well, and anecdotal evidence from keynotes and delegates was very positive.
- **To talk to panellists** immediately after their sessions. This also appeared to work well, and anecdotal evidence from delegates was very positive.
- **To talk to publishers**. Feedback from publishers was positive, and though few delegates used this opportunity, anecdotal feedback was good.

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- **To talk to each other.** This was less successful, and delegates were not proactive in setting up meetings. We put instructions about this on the website, in the programme and also referred to it during the opening, but maybe this wasn't clear enough.

A host was available to greet delegates in a Zoom Meeting room and they were then asked where they would like to go / who they wanted to talk to. They were then sent into a breakout room. At times this virtual space was extremely busy with participants arriving and moving in and out of the breakout rooms. As hosts we enjoyed these moments very much and it gave us an opportunity to see some of the delegates and chat a little as they passed by.

We considered using [Slack](#) workspace or a LinkedIn group for social interaction but decided, as neither of these were very familiar to us, we would try the breakout rooms.

There are conference platforms, which provide spaces for social interaction. We considered [Whova](#), but with a small number of delegates (under 100) it was not worth it.

Replicating the real thing /social events

We planned for social events, just as we would have done at a f2f conference. We had a Quiz Night and a live-streamed concert (sponsored by a Cambridge Assessment English). These were not attended by many delegates, but anecdotal feedback was very positive. We would recommend doing something similar.

We wanted delegates to experience Lisbon / Portugal, despite not actually travelling to the conference venue. We gave them [the sounds](#) (a musical performance by faculty students and the live-streamed concert), [the views](#) through a link to a video of Lisbon on the website and [the tastes](#) in a collection of recipes, which was compiled from recipes given by colleagues on the organising committee.

Recording presentations

We discussed a protocol for recording, as well as who owned the recordings with the legal department at the university. Presenters were required to give formal permission by signing a permissions form. Presentations that were recorded with permission have been made available on a private YouTube channel for 6 months. Feedback on this has been very positive, with delegates keen to watch recordings.

Zoom Meetings not Zoom Webinars

Our faculty has a Zoom account for its faculty members and researchers, so we used Zoom as a platform. We preferred Zoom Meetings to Zoom Webinars from our own experiences attending online conferences. Zoom Meetings enable participants to see each other and interact more easily. We also felt it encouraged informality and was fairly easy to moderate.

Clear instructions were given to delegates regarding how to participate online. Zoom Room settings ensured that delegates' cameras were on but sound was muted when they joined. We also encouraged delegates to have their cameras on whenever possible to contribute to a feeling of community. We also gave instructions to correct names on their Zoom accounts, so

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that it was clear who everyone was, but also so we could avoid Zoom Bombing, although thankfully this wasn't a problem we experienced.

Each Zoom room needed a host to ensure the technical support, and a chair to look after the speakers, introduce them and manage the question times. This worked well.

In preparation for this we had to give very clear instructions to Hosts, who were also responsible for setting up Zoom Sessions through their university zoom accounts, with the links to these providing access to the conference sessions via the conference Zoom room map. We also met three times online to help them get used to setting up a Zoom Meeting, how to make Chairs co-hosts, how to record etc. This meant that colleagues were more confident, and things went smoothly. We had only minor technical hitches.

The document with links to the sessions, a Zoom Room map, was sent via email to registered delegates only, with strict instructions that it not be shared. We also requested that delegates keep this document open on their desktops, so that they could easily access the links and move freeing in and out of sessions.

When setting up a Zoom Meeting we recommend the following settings:

Time add to Google calendar

Meeting ID select 'Generate automatically'

Security select 'Waiting Room'; un-select 'Passcode' and 'Require authentication'

Video host and participant 'ON'

Meeting Options select 'Mute participants upon entry'

We suggest that the Meeting ID is generated automatically, as this will create a shorter link, which is easier to paste into the programme or links document.

A float

We decided that one of us, as convenor, would be available as a float in case a chair or host became unavailable or if something happened. This made scheduling quite tricky as we needed 7 people when running three parallel sessions (a chair and host in each session plus a float). Nevertheless, we would recommend having a float in case additional support is needed.

What made TEdELL2020 successful?

We got overwhelming feedback during and after the event. So, we thought we'd try to tease out what we did which meant it went so well.

Many delegates had not attended a conference since the lockdown in March, so they were desperate to be with colleagues and fellow scholars. This was to our benefit!

From feedback, as well as our own personal feelings, we have listed some things we think also helped:

- 1) Our regular meetings and the sharing of responsibilities. The two of us were a real team.
- 2) We actively looked for information and support from the virtual community, to help us organise a great conference.

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- 3) The option to use Zoom Meetings rather than Zoom Webinars, due to its openness and opportunity for all delegates to speak if they wish.
- 4) The detailed information we gave to hosts and chairs and the practice sessions for hosts, delegates and keynote speakers, so that everyone involved felt confident and supported.
- 5) A feeling of community was built through:
 - relaxed openings and closings of the opening session, keynotes and round table session.
 - our habit of greeting everyone as they arrived in the Zoom Meeting space, at least until a session officially started.
 - the vast majority of delegates having their cameras on so we could all see one another.
 - including question times at the end of sessions, where delegates could unmute and ask their questions themselves.
 - asking participants to unmute themselves and clap at the end of each session
 - opportunities for delegates to talk to each other if they wished during Coffee Break Outs e.g. the keynote speakers, colleagues who had given presentations, reps from publishers.
- 6) The regular and longer breaks meant we could manage cognitive overload.
- 7) The detailed information which included the programme, the book of abstracts and Zoom Room map (with links). The Zoom Room map was especially important and mentioned as very useful by delegates.
- 8) Being 'on duty' during Coffee Breakouts meant we (as convenors) were able to meet delegates and chat a little. We think it made it more personal for those who used this opportunity.
- 9) Responding to emails immediately and personally. We were quickly able to resolve problems and successfully connect with delegates.
- 10) The special touches we included e.g. the recipe book, the musical opening, the social events etc. We showed we cared.

We wish you all the best with your event and hope that these shared tips are useful. Please do get in touch if you have any queries or want further information.

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