

UTILISE: How to hold a successful virtual SEND alumni event

Sometimes, online meetings or webinars are a good way for your SEND alumni volunteers to interact with students and support your CEIAG.

The tips below will help you keep this meeting as interactive as possible.

Before the event

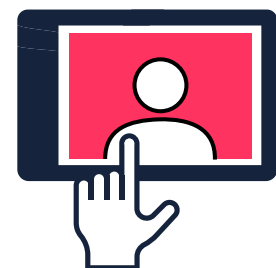
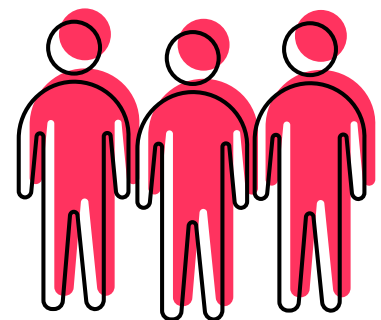
Decide whether this event is a webinar or a meeting. In a webinar, only presenters can control what is on the screen, use their microphone or direct operations. People attending the webinar can contribute via chat, Q and A and polls.

- A meeting is more interactive and gives everyone control.
- For events where large numbers of pupils are interacting with a SEND alumni, a webinar might be best. Platforms have settings for live events that allow controls to be set up differently.
- For more informal events, like a supervised mentoring session, a meeting might be best.

Send all participants a meeting link well in advance. They may need to practice connecting with the platform you are using before the meeting. Your alumni volunteers may need support with accessing the platform so make sure that they have the contact details of someone who will help them. They may need support with other types of preparation too.

A good way to start a webinar is with a video clip relevant to the event. It can settle everyone in and give you time to support anyone having access issues. You will find that participants will alert you to any problems with sound or vision settings if you do this.

It's a good idea to have one person to chair the event. The chair of the event can intervene to keep things pacy, or to stop one person dominating. They can also manage the transitions from one segment to another.



During the event

- It's a good idea to disable students video so they cannot be seen by external audiences. This is for child protection reasons.
- Make sure you or someone else who is supporting the meeting, is there at least 10 minutes before the start to admit people (if your platform requires that the use of a virtual 'lobby'), informally welcome them, help with pre-meeting enquiries etc.
- At the same time as sending the link, send the agenda and make this accessible to everyone who is attending. Take your SEND alumni volunteers' needs into account when you produce the agenda.
- The agenda should contain



- What the talking points are.
- The structure and timings for each talking point.
- Who will be leading the meeting/webinar.
- Who will be attending the meeting/webinar.
- Links to any relevant files or resources.

At the start of the meeting/webinar

- Introduce yourself.
- Ask other meeting leaders to introduce themselves.
- If the group is small enough, invite everyone to make an informal contribution. Give clear instructions, 'So, I'll ask each of you in turn to say who you are, where you work and what role you have there. Please respond using your microphone. If this is not working, please use the meeting chat. When not speaking, please keep your microphone on mute'.
- Briefly revisit the agenda and purpose of the meeting/event.
- Brief everyone on the meeting etiquette
 - When attendees should mute their microphone.
 - When attendees should have their video on?
 - How to signal when you want to contribute (hands up icon for example).
 - What to do if your connection breaks.
 - That common courtesy is expected – people want to be seen, heard, and respected in an online meeting just like anywhere else.
- Brief attendees on how to use the platform tools. This is important for confidence.

Keeping everyone involved

Use your platform's interactive tools to keep everyone involved.

These tools may include:



Emoticons.

Plan some tasks and activities where people at the event use these to communicate a response.



Polls

Use your platform's polls to set up meaningful quizzes and questions. These can be anonymous. It is important that the questions are given careful thought so there is a clear link with the discussion point.



Chat bar

Encourage people to write thoughts and questions in the meeting/webinar chat. Make sure you have someone other than the presenter monitoring and managing these so that they can be acknowledged and brought into the discussion. It is advisable to disable any 'private' chat options so that all comments are public. This is for safeguarding reasons.

The tools above are good for involving people who may be more introverted.



Whiteboard draw

If you have a smaller group, attendees can draw or paste on the whiteboard. Keep the task as structured as you can to enable meaningful and confident contributions.

Change the pace

- Change who is speaking and the type of interaction often through the webinar or meeting. You can do this by:
 - Using a variety of different speakers
 - Having video or activity breaks
 - Using breakout rooms where people can either chat informally or work together on a task to bring back to the main meeting.
 - Sharing your screen to allow varied ways to present, to avoid monotony.
 - Giving time for people to chat informally or take comfort breaks.
- Structure the meeting into short segments.

Happy endings

Good ways to end the event are:

- Holding an open Q and A session
- Using polls with free text or multiple answers to gather reflections and feedback
- Reflecting on what has been achieved in the meeting
- Going over next steps

Thanks should be given to all lead contributors and attendees, with celebration of the contribution made by SEND alumni.

Most importantly, the relevance and legacy of the session for careers and life after school should be noted.