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**Adapting outreach activity and delivering online:**

A best practice guide for SMF employer partners

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last few months, the Social Mobility Foundation (SMF) has been working on shaping and adapting the organisation's student activity in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The organisation has been developing online activities that continue to support the young people on our programme in gaining the professional skills and sector insights that they need to help them achieve their potential.

This guide describes our approach to online delivery for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It provides information and guidance on choosing an online platform, safeguarding, and planning, delivering and evaluating virtual activity. We hope that you will find it helpful - both for creating online content for your own outreach activities and when working with the SMF to deliver virtual activity.

## 2. Working with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds

It is already well understood that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately affected in their ability to access selective universities and top professions. 60% of people in professional jobs come from professional family backgrounds themselves and only 5% of students eligible for Free School Meals go on to study at the most selective universities.

Disadvantaged students and their futures are set to be disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Educational disadvantage and 'the summer slide'

Teachers and researchers have long been aware of the impact of the "summer slide" – where the prolonged summer break each year has a cumulative effect on educational outcomes and sees children from low incomes fall behind on key measures. With students now potentially out of school for five months, the impact on children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds could be even higher.

SMF's campaigning arm, the Department for Opportunities (DO), recently published a [YouGov poll](#) which demonstrates that students from low income families are significantly less likely to have a quiet space to study or access to a tutor, which could lead to a widening of the attainment gap.

### Access to employers and technological barriers

Access to devices and equipment can be varied and young people will have varying home set-ups, as highlighted in [SMF's Technology Survey](#). When planning content and choosing delivery methods, it is worth taking factors such as the below into consideration.

- Length of workshop
- Ability to join via different devices
- Level of interaction required from student
- Recording content that can be viewed at a time that suits the student

### An opportunity to widen your reach

As online delivery and content develops, it presents an opportunity to engage with young people further afield. As employers and organisations start to develop online content, the ability to reach students across the UK grows and with it access to greater diversity and talent.

If you are presenting to a more geographically diverse audience than usual, be aware that some terms do not apply to students outside of England and Wales. Some useful term replacements are:

- **School or college** instead of **Sixth Form**
- **Exams** instead of **A-Levels**.

### 3. Technology and Platforms

#### Considering different platforms

When choosing a platform for online delivery a number of factors can inform your choice, based around your delivery requirements, safeguarding considerations, the interactivity of an online platform, and its technology requirements.

The table below is used by the SMF to select appropriate online platforms for our delivery needs and can be adapted for use.

Table 1. Deciding on an online platform

Requirement	Platform X	Platform Y	Platform Z
Max Attendees			
Cost (p/m)			
<b>Safeguarding</b>			
Names visible			
Private chat			
Mute attendees			
<b>Interactivity</b>			
Polling feature			
Q&A			
Waiting room			
Multiple presenters			
Mobile call in			
Registration			
Recording feature			
<b>Technology requirements</b>			
Wi-Fi usage			
Multiple device access			
<b>Summary</b>			
Recommended?			
Suitable activity type	e.g. Presentations, group work and information-giving sessions.		
Notes			

#### Factors to consider when selecting an online platform

General requirements:

- What might be your maximum number of attendees? What is the maximum attendee capacity of the platform?
- What are the cost implications of the platform?

#### Safeguarding:

- Will participants be under 18 or from vulnerable groups?
- Safeguarding considerations covered in detail in: [Safeguarding](#)

#### Interactivity:

- How much interaction do you want to have with your attendees?
- How many presenters do you need in one session?
- Do you need to be able to record a session?
- Do you need your sessions to require individual registration? Will your sessions be password protected?

#### Technology:

- What Wi-Fi capability is required of your attendees to access a platform?
- Can the platform be accessed across multiple devices (e.g. laptop, tablet, mobile phone)?

#### Compliance with your corporate security policies

- Are there any internal restrictions or policies around using certain platforms?

### Why SMF is using Zoom

SMF has chosen Zoom as our main platform to deliver virtual student interactions such as webinars and virtual placements. Zoom allows SMF to host webinars and meetings with both students and employers on any device. This is an important factor in ensuring our online content is accessible to students regardless of whether they have access to a laptop, tablet or mobile phone. Zoom also allows for large attendee capacity, meaning that SMF can deliver content to large groups.

With a large proportion of SMF participants being aged under 18, there are a number of safeguarding considerations that SMF is able to adequately meet by using Zoom. These allow us to ensure we deliver online in line with our safeguarding policy and maintain data privacy:

- ✓ During webinars, attendees can be muted and their videos cannot be seen
- ✓ Zoom allows for attendees' questions asked in the Q&A to remain hidden from other attendees
- ✓ Attendees can be promoted and demoted between attendee and panellist, allowing for attendees to present to the webinar where necessary

## 4. Safeguarding for online delivery: Protecting students, staff and employers

Delivering to students online rather than in person comes with additional safeguarding factors that all involved must consider. To continue protecting our students, staff and employer partners, SMF has introduced new guidance for online delivery.

Below are the main points from this guidance, which can serve as a starting point or supplementary points for your own safeguarding considerations.

- All staff involved in online delivery should be fully familiar with any platform used and have the latest version of the platform installed.
- Webinars and video calls will require registration and be password protected and, unless essential, students will not be unmuted or able to enter a private chat.
- Presenters should dress and conduct themselves as if in person in a professional setting. Their background and setting should be neutral with no personal information visible.
- Guest speakers in webinars and video calls will be given particular guidance about safeguarding policies. In some cases, speakers will be DBS checked ahead of delivery.
- Parental consent will be gathered specifically for the activity being delivered.
- The number of staff present in webinars and video calls will be given careful consideration. We will never have only one adult in a virtual meeting with students.
- Platform functionality will be carefully considered to minimise the sharing of personal data, for example through the use of anonymous Q&A functions.
- Students and speakers will be given clear guidance on the process for reporting any safeguarding concerns.
- SMF has developed a full risk assessment for online delivery – if you would like a copy of this please let us know.

As we develop our online delivery programme with our employer partners, we may get in touch with you to ask for a brief audit of the platforms and capabilities you intend to use and their security measures.

## 5. Virtual delivery: Presenting, engaging and interacting with students

Presenting to students online can be a very different experience to presenting in person and it will be a different experience for students participating too. Anything that the presenters can do to keep them engaged will help students to make the most of the virtual support.

In this section, you will find some of the guidance and tips the SMF have been using to adapt to presenting online. You may find this useful when delivering to SMF students, but also any other webinars or meetings you might take part in.

### Planning and structuring your session

We have found that shortening sessions, especially those with less interaction from students, has helped to maintain their engagement. It is more difficult to keep people's attention when speaking over a webcam than in person; much of a presenter's body language and movement that helps keep focussed on them in person can be lost. You could consider the following points:

- The aims of your session – can you take out any parts that might have been included in a face to face session but still meet these aims? Are there certain parts that you will need to keep in your session in order to help students meet the aims?
- How will you structure the session? Having clearly marked segments can help maintain engagement with students rather than one lengthy presentation
- How often will you ask students to interact with you? What kind of interactions will be available on your platform?
- What will students see as you present to them? If you are using a PowerPoint, consider how much text is on each of the slides; too little and students who find it harder to learn through listening may not take in all information, too much and it could become overwhelming to read whilst listening
- When and how will students have the opportunity to ask questions?

### Competencies, aims and objectives

Before developing the content of your session, it is a good idea to step back and consider what you intend participants to take away and learn from the session. The SMF have developed a competency framework called Building My Future: The Toolkit. The five areas within the toolkit act as starting points when planning activities for our students. Each area includes more detailed objectives that relate to specific content.

When planning a series of related events or sessions, a competency framework and explanation of the aims or objectives can add structure and coherence for participants. It also enables structured evaluation of activities (see section 8 for further detail).

## Student Interaction

For young people, engaging professionally online will be a very new experience. Young people often have a wealth of knowledge when it comes to using technology informally and socially, so supporting them to recognise how it should be used in a professional context is important. At the SMF, we have introduced students to how to present themselves professionally online. However, many students might not have had this guidance, so setting expectations and rules of practice at the start of a session or virtual internship can help students to adapt to a professional virtual setting.

As our survey to students highlighted, some young people may not have access to a quiet space or may be attending a webinar from a shared space. If you are running an event where students need their webcams on, be considerate of different home environments and reassure attendees that we understand that there may be unavoidable noise or interruptions.

At the SMF, we have repurposed how we deliver some of the interactive elements from our face to face sessions. Please get in touch with us for more information about how these sessions have been adapted.

## Presenting tips

Below is a summary of some of the tips that we at the SMF have used when presenting to our students. If you are less experienced with delivering to students or presenting online, these may help you prepare. Some of the points may seem obvious, but when presenting online they are things you may need to actively think about doing because many of the social cues we would have in person are lost.



Building My Options for Education and Work		
Understand the support available to me in order to enter the professional world	Prepare effectively for university applications and recruitment processes, making use of the resources available to me	Make confident and informed choices about my own future, including education routes and pathways into work

- Posture and gesticulation: an upright posture and using your hands as you would in person can make you sound enthusiastic and energised.
- Look at the camera to keep students engaged: this is as close to making eye contact as online delivery allows.
- Smile: as the students or participants will only see your face, a warm and welcoming presence can really help them to settle into the webinar or meeting.
- Eyes and eyebrows: this may seem strange, but consciously opening our eyes and lifting our eyebrows can make us instantly more engaging to others.
- Voice: speaking louder than you think will help increase the energy of your delivery.
- Varying your speed and tone: speaking slower than you normally would, especially on important points helps to emphasise them. Exaggerating the ups and downs in your speech also makes it more engaging to listen to.

## 6. Evaluating online delivery

Effective evaluation and analysis of participants' engagement is essential when delivering any outreach activity whether it is face to face or online, and is something the SMF monitors closely in its Social Mobility Employer Index. Evaluation allows us to assess whether a session has met the aims and provides valuable feedback that we can use to improve and adapt the content or delivery.

Virtual delivery presents an opportunity for instant feedback, as online platforms can easily track the drop-off rate and engagement in interactive polls etc.

At the SMF, we ask our students for both quantitative and qualitative feedback after each event, experience or opportunity we offer them against the competency framework. If you do not already have a model for evaluating activity, or you would like to refresh your model, you can consider the points below.

- **What can you find out from participants' interaction during the event?** Can the platform you use record or track responses to quizzes, polls, raising hands, Q&A or chats? You can then look at whether engagement tails off, or particular parts have better engagement.
- **What can you find out after the event?** You may want to collect responses from participants immediately, or give them time to reflect on their experience.
- **What will you ask participants in your evaluation?** Using the objectives of the activity is a great starting point for structuring your questioning; how well do participants feel they met these objectives? Which part of the activity helped them to meet each objective best? Are there any objectives they feel they haven't progressed towards or met? If you're using a competency framework you can map the questions to this.
- **What will you measure participants' progress against?** You could set a task at the start and end of the activity to measure change, or ask participants about their own learning; did they know or feel confident about a certain skill before the activity, and how do they feel about it now?

- **How can you incorporate qualitative data into your evaluation?** This can be as simple as an open space question asking for further comments, or could be slightly more structured, asking for participants' opinions on particular elements of your activity. Reading through the responses may take time but can provide an invaluable sense of how the activity was received by participants.

## Get in touch

We're delighted to be working closely with our employer partners on virtual support for our students at this time. If you are interested in working with us to support SMF students virtually then please do get in touch. We are happy to provide more detailed guidance on timetables and session design.

✉ [employers@socialmobility.org.uk](mailto:employers@socialmobility.org.uk)

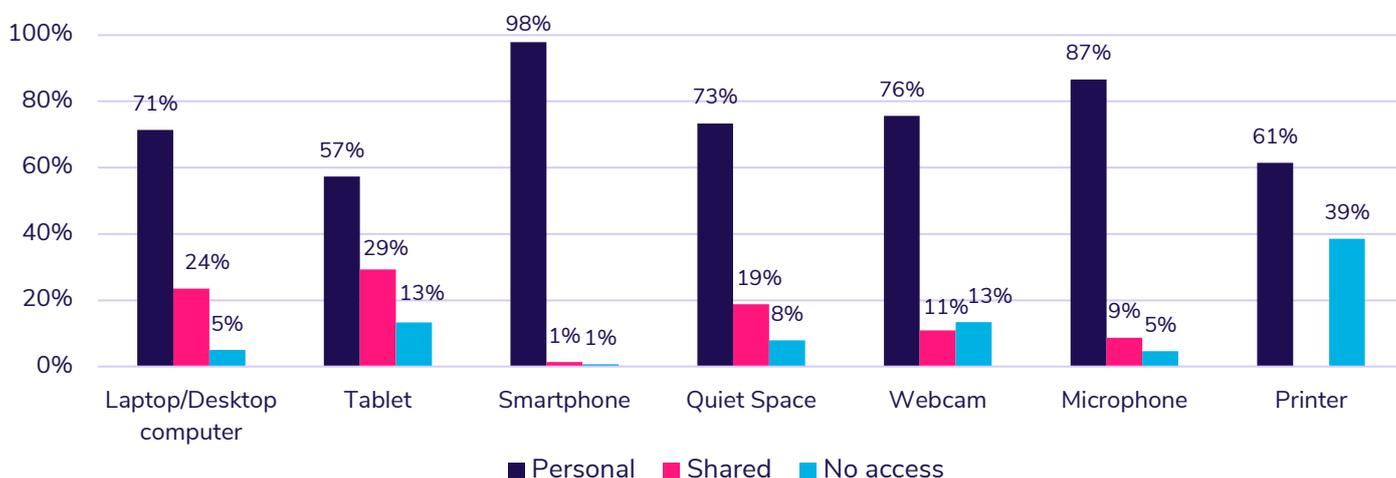
## Appendix

### SMF Technology Survey

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Social Mobility Foundation carried out a survey across all students taking part in our programmes to establish their access to hardware to ensure they would be able to engage in virtual activity. 2446 students completed the survey between 24th March and 6th April 2020.

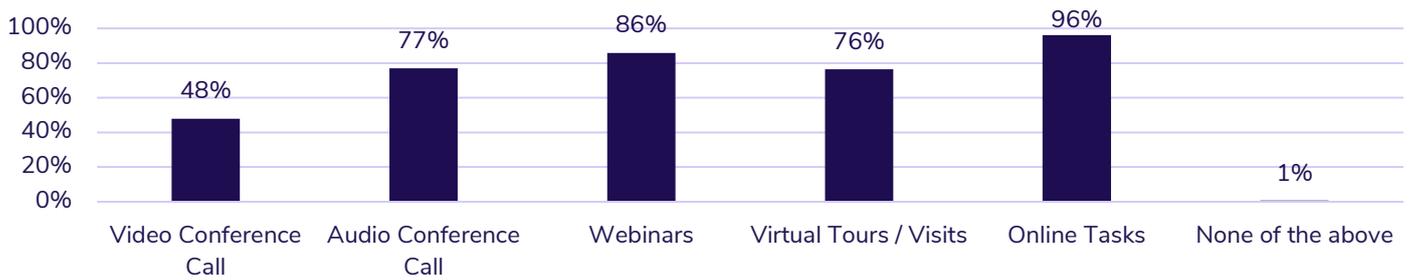
Year 12/S5

#### Do you have personal, shared or no access to the following technology at home?



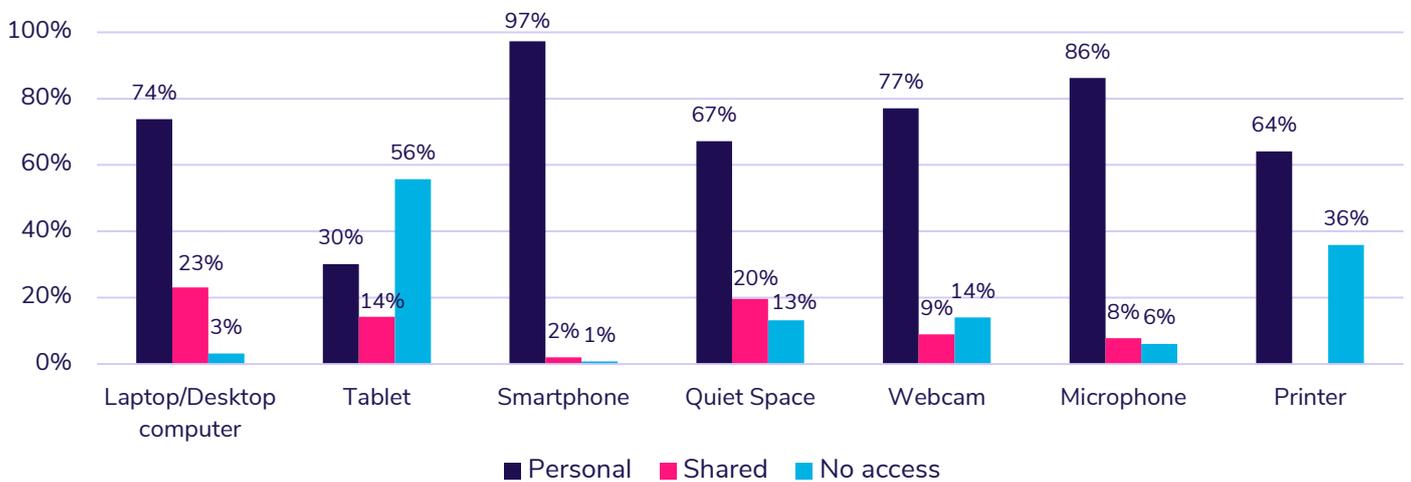
- 1608 Year 12/S5 students responded to the survey
- The most common device students have access to is a smartphone, however 2% report having shared/no access
- 29% have shared/no access to a computer
- 27% have shared/no access to a quiet space
- 19% (310 students) have shared access to a computer or tablet (no personal device)
- 3% (47 students) have no computer or tablet, all but one of these students has a smartphone
- 62% (998 students) would join an online session by computer, 28% (457 students) by smartphone
- 72% (1130 students) report a strong Wi-Fi connection, 27% (430 students) report weak Wi-Fi that frequently cuts out, and 1% (19 students) are using mobile phone data only
- 59% (944 students) have identified having personal access to a computer or tablet, mic, and quiet space to participate in a workshop.

## What online activities are you most likely to engage in?



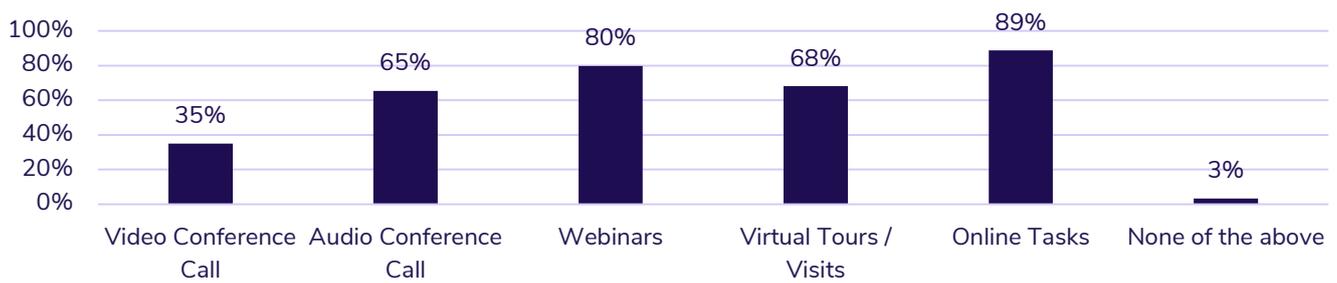
## Year 13/S6

### Do you have personal, shared or no access to the following technology at home?



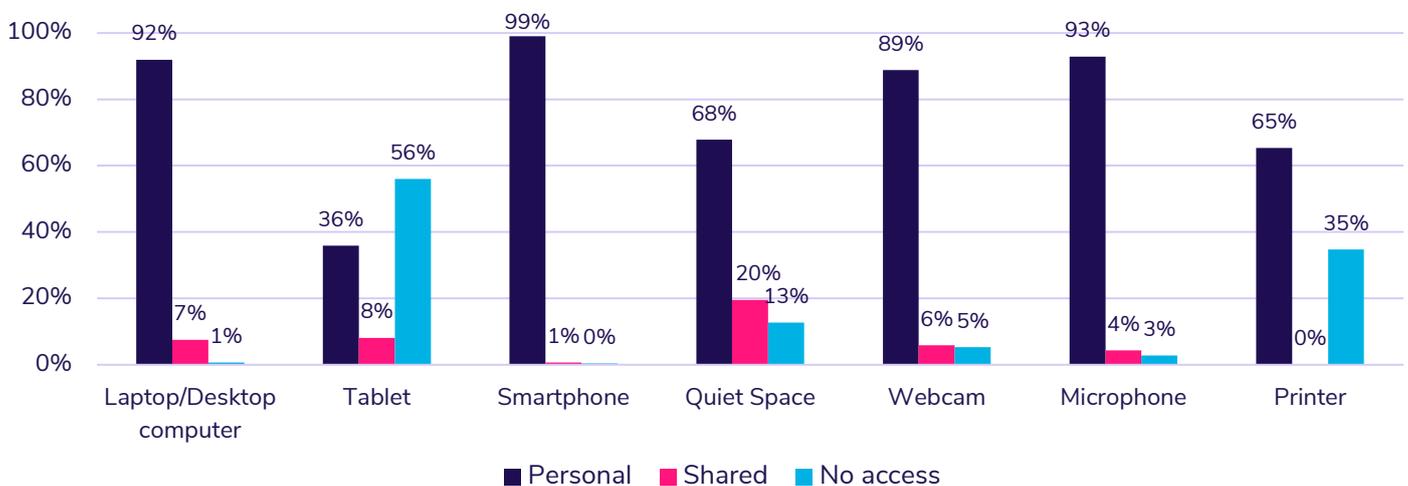
- 515 Year 13/S6 students responded to the survey
- Again, the most common device students have access to is a smartphone, however 3% report having shared/no access.
- 34% have shared/no access to a computer
- 33% have shared/no access to a quiet space
- 19% (97 students) have shared access to a computer or tablet (no personal device)
- 1.7% (9 students) have no computer or tablet, all of these students have a smartphone
- 64% (330 students) would join an online session by computer, 26% (134 students) by smartphone
- 69% (357 students) report a strong Wi-Fi connection, 30% (152 students) report weak Wi-Fi that frequently cuts out, and 1% (6 students) are using mobile phone data only
- 53% (275 students) have identified having personal access to a computer or tablet, mic, and quiet space to participate in a workshop.

## What online activities are you most likely to engage in?



## Undergraduates

### Do you have personal, shared or no access to the following technology at home?



- 323 undergraduate students responded to the survey
- Again, the most common device students have access to is a smartphone, however 2% report having shared/no access.
- 8% have shared/no access to a computer
- 32% have shared/no access to a quiet space
- 15% (49 students) have shared access to a computer or tablet (no personal device)
- 2 students have no access to a computer, however both students have personal access to both a tablet and smartphone
- 86% (278 students) would join an online session by computer, 9% (30 students) by smartphone
- 68% (221 students) report a strong Wi-Fi connection, 30% (98 students) report weak Wi-Fi that frequently cuts out, and 1% (4 students) are using mobile phone data only
- 63% (204 students) have identified having personal access to a computer or tablet, mic, and quiet space to participate in a workshop, the highest percentage of any group.

### What online activities are you most likely to engage in?

