Choosing a platform for your online seminar
or writers' retreat

There are numerous options at hand for postgraduate researcher (PGR)-led seminars and/or writers' retreats. This document outlines a few options.

We recommend that you host around 20 participants for an interactive webinar and that you avoid going over 30, unless you are aiming for primarily one-way delivery.

Zoom – video conferencing/webinar platform.

(Avoid using Zoom for events that contain highly sensitive information such as primary data collection)

- Participants can choose whether to use their webcams and/or microphones.
- Discussions can be conducted verbally or typed in the chat window.
- A break-out room function allows you to split participants in pairs or small groups for discussion.
- The screen sharing option allows sharing of PowerPoint slides and/or videos.
- Note that the free version of Zoom only accommodates live sessions for up to 40 minutes. Bristol Doctoral College has access to a PRO account with no time restrictions, and we can help set-up a virtual webinar room for you to host a PGR-led event. To book a virtual webinar room on Zoom please email Sarah Kelley at sarah.kelley@bristol.ac.uk.

Blackboard Collaborate - video conferencing/webinar platform.

- Participants can choose whether to use their webcams and/or microphones.
- Discussions can be conducted verbally or typed in the chat window.
- A break-out room function allows you to split participants in pairs or small groups for discussion.
- The screen sharing option allows sharing of PowerPoint slides and/or videos. Collaborate is part of the University's Blackboard package and all Bristol PGRs have free access to it.
- To create a Blackboard collaborate session, you first need to self-enrol on the "PGR-led Online Events" organisation page. Use Chrome or Firefox to open Blackboard, click on courses at the top and search for "PGR-led Online Events" in the organisation search. Click on this and follow the instructions to self-enrol. Once in the organisation, you will see an announcement with further instructions for setting up a Collaborate session. It will involve requesting 'Builder' access so make sure you allow time for this to be granted. The Digital Education Office provides detailed advice on how to set-up and manage Collaborate sessions on blackboard here.

Bluejeans – video conferencing/webinar platform

- Participants can choose whether to use their webcams and/or microphones.
- Discussions can be conducted verbally or typed in the chat window.
- A break-out room function allows you to split participants in pairs or small groups for discussion.
- The screen sharing option allows sharing of Powerpoint slides and/or videos.
- You can request a Bluejeans account from the IT service desk at service-desk@bristol.ac.uk. Detailed advice on how to use Bluejeans can be found here.

Skype for Business – video conferencing/webinar platform.

- All PGRs should now have access to Skype for Business. For further guidance click here.
- Participants can choose whether or not to use their webcams and/or microphones.
- Discussions can be conducted verbally or typed in the chat window.
- As there is no option to create break out rooms, this may be suited to a smaller number of participants.
- The sharing function allows sharing of PowerPoint slides/documents with information.

Email

- Email can be a low-tech way of running a writers' retreat or co-working.
- You can pre-send participants necessary information (E.g. plan for the day, content to work through during different work blocks).
- Points of interaction are conducted via simple email exchange (large group emails and emails between pairs if required).

Whatsapp

- This app can be a low-tech way of running a writers' retreat or co-working.
- The content and structure of the writers' retreat can remain roughly the same as above if all participants are sent this information in advance.
- Points of interaction are conducted via simple instant chat for the whole group or for pairs.
- As this involves the use of participants' phone numbers you would have to ensure that everyone is comfortable sharing this information.

Find out more

- Download our draft structure template to edit and share with your participants
- Read our guidance on leading your own online writers' retreat
- Read our 7 steps for planning a successful live webinar
- If you have any questions about hosting your own writers' retreat, please contact Sarah Kelley (sarah.kelley@bristol.ac.uk).