As restrictions ease, face-to-face interview risks are being reduced by an increasing move to using remote virtual platforms instead of traditional methods

More people than ever are now familiar with video conferencing via Skype, FaceTime, Zoom or other tools. Even if they don’t use them at work, many people have been using them socially during lockdown, shielding or self isolation to keep in touch with family and friends. There are both benefits and pitfalls to this development so here are some tips on how to use video in the recruitment process effectively.

**Choose Your Technology**

Decide well in advance which system you will use and then check that it is a platform which has been approved of by your PCN – Microsoft Office Teams has been adopted as the default platform by many NHS organisations. Test it and communicate this to candidates as soon as you can. Most people will know Skype, FaceTime or Zoom, but if you use a less popular service, you run the risk that the applicant will not be able to use it, or they will be delayed in getting up and running. That could put your call off to a shaky start. Zoom has lifted some restrictions from their freemium version and other companies are following suit, so make sure to check whether your favourite service has been made available for free. Microsoft Office Teams is increasingly being used by a wide range of organisations and can be accessed by members of the public to keep in touch with family and friends - <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/teams-for-home>.

Whatever is your preferred platform, ensure that this is communicated to your candidate when you confirm their interview slot and consider whether to provide some basic instructions about how it will be used for the purposes of the interview. An additional resource for you to send to your interviewees has also been created in respect of using Microsoft Teams which can be found here – <https://primarycaredorset.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ARRS-Recruitment-Interviewing-using-Virtual-Platforms-Candidate.docx>

**Set the Scene**

* Many of the same tips apply to video interviews as for video conferencing from home
* Use a webcam if possible or raise your laptop so the camera is level with your eyes (if homeworking books, cushions or pillows can be useful to rest it on to increase height).
* Keep your face well-lit from the front. Don’t be a scary silhouette, but don’t be so brightly lit you are ‘washed out’. Adjust laptop positioning to achieve the best lighting, close blinds or curtains in needed and don’t forget to test how your set up looks when you activate the video feed.
* A headset gives better sound quality than most built-in microphones and speakers.
* Consider what’s visible in your background, keep it professional, but interesting. Try to avoid a totally blank wall behind you if possible. Although not recommended, if you opt to select any available backgrounds instead, ensure that it is an appropriate image and not too distracting for the candidate.
* Wear what you would typically wear when interviewing. If that’s dress down, fine. If it’s a suit and tie, then still make the effort.
* Using an ethernet cable can be faster and more robust than WIFI – and make sure your laptop is plugged in even if your battery is fully charged!
* And, as a general rule, if interviewing from home try to ensure that you have taken steps to ensure that you won’t be interrupted by small children or pets.

**Be Prepared**

Be just as professional and prepared as you would in person. Always know which candidate is on the other side of the screen! Read any application form, cover letter or CV well before the interview. It can be tempting to scan the CV during the call but bear in mind the applicant on the other side of the screen can also see you. Have their phone number and email handy in case of any technical difficulties.

For many applicants, an interview is already very stressful. If they also have to conduct the conversation in a way that is unfamiliar, they could be more nervous than usual. Keep the beginning light-hearted to help settle them so they can give the best account of themselves during the process. Explain that you recognise things are different from what was planned, set them at ease with some small-talk and don’t start asking the most difficult questions right away. Remember to offer to repeat any questions if needed which will also help the candidate to compose their frame of mind.

**Three’s a Crowd**

With video, if you have decided on a panel interview, rehearse with your colleagues ground rules like being on mute when not speaking, and warn the candidate in advance that it will be a panel interview. If you are using features you haven’t used before, have a rehearsal with a colleague before the actual interview. Use the skills of other panel members for certain elements i.e. sharing screens in Microsoft Teams

for PowerPoint presentations but be mindful that you should still have some understanding of how to do it yourself in case, for any reason, they are unable to fully participate in the interview i.e. poor connectivity. Still run through the usual housekeeping elements – explain the format of the interview, that you may be taking notes. If the panel members are not sharing the same laptop but are connecting to the call from different locations, run through what will happen if they have connectivity or technical issues – have a “Plan B” as to how you will respond to that scenario should it occur so that it isn’t off-putting for the candidate.

**Is Video Interviewing… Better?**

Video should not be seen as a poor substitute for face to face interviews. It has several advantages. Think how you can use the technology and what video can potentially do better.

* If the candidate is making a presentation, passing control to them to present online may be a more realistic assessment for the actual role than an in person talk. However, be aware that if they do not have any experience of remote presentation or using platforms such as Microsoft Office then they will be disadvantaged against other candidates who have more experience in virtual presentations. You will need to decide whether you ask them to submit their presentation prior to the interview for you to control while they “speak” to the slides. This will have the advantage of all candidates being assessed from the same baseline and providing equal opportunity for all.
* Video interviewing can make it easier for candidates with disabilities to attend and shine at interviews, as well as for remote stakeholders to be part of the hiring process.
* Given the expected surge in home-working after Corona and changed working practices to reflect the pandemic, remote interviews may give a better feel for how remote workers will communicate and perform.

**Make Allowances**

Make allowances – for both yourself and the candidates. Some candidates will already be comfortable and familiar with video conferencing. If a candidate isn’t used to speaking on video, it can be intimidating. We are all working under certain restrictions – they may not have the ideal set up in terms of a quality camera or fast home laptop. They might be used to video chat on a phone or tablet.

Be understanding that due to lock-down and the devolvement of office working to a

home working environment, they may not have a dedicated home office space. If a child or pet walks into the background and interrupts – well, it can happen to the best of us when working from home and these are unusual times. Make light of it and keep them at their ease. Don’t count it as a black mark when it’s an opportunity to be kind – and to see how they handle it. In the new post-Covid world, video call skills are likely to become increasingly important.