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**Running an Online Citizens’ Jury – what we learnt**

In September 2020 we ran an Online Citizens’ Jury on social care in Wales (visit [www.mtm.wales/the-citizens-juries](http://www.mtm.wales/the-citizens-juries) to learn more). Originally, we were going to run this as an in-person event in May, however, the outbreak of Covid-19 made that impossible. This was a significant change of approach that, ultimately, proved very successful but was not without its issues.

As online approaches look likely to be the norm, this is a quick breakdown of the tech and set-up we used, and some of the lessons that we learnt.

**The tech and the set-up**

In an effort to mitigate risk and make things as easy as possible, as well as make the Jury as open to all as we could, we provided all the Jurors with a Chromebook. These are an affordable, basic laptop that ensured all the Jurors had a suitable device to join the sessions with. By doing this, we also only ever needed to issue one set of instructions for anything tech-related.

The Jury ran from September 21st to 25th, and we held a prep-meeting on September 12th so the Jurors could start to get to know one another, meet the facilitator and get used to the technology. This session was incredibly useful and flagged some issues around the functionality of the tech, and the need to provide additional guidance to our Jurors, for example on which hot keys to use to mute / unmute themselves.

We used Google Meet for the sessions, WhatsApp for additional chat and communication, and OBS (Open Broadcast Software) for streaming to YouTube. OBS was great and offered a very high level of functionality; it took some getting used to but there are lots of YouTube videos that offer guidance.

Four of us gathered to run the sessions using several large conference rooms – it was not essential that we met but it made life much easier and much less stressful. Of the four of us, one was the facilitator, one the tech lead, one the main contact for the Jurors and one was additional support. As we were in different rooms we had a WhatsApp group for the four of us so we could keep one another posted about any issues or tasks that needed doing.

We did not often need all four of us, but particularly at the start of sessions, when people were joining, it was very useful to have more of us on hand.

**Things will definitely go wrong with people getting online (and everything else!)**

We had opted to use Google Meet for the sessions as it’s a very straightforward tool with no over-elaboration and the option to add specific Chrome extensions for additional functionality. However, we discovered that people trying to access Google Meet from a local authority or health board device probably would not be able to; and part way through the Jury, Meet got an update that rendered one of our extensions useless.

Testing and drop-in sessions go a long way to getting everyone comfortable and making sure that people can use the links and join the sessions successfully. Even with this, things will go wrong – we lost connectivity for the laptop we were streaming the sessions with and had to record one of them and upload it afterwards. It was not a disaster, it just needed some quick, clear thinking to resolve it.

We also had some issues with people’s connectivity that made it difficult for some Jurors to ask their questions. In response to this, we created a specific WhatsApp group that Jurors could use to share their questions. The facilitator could then ask the question, or call on the Juror to do so depending on the quality of the connection.

**Group dynamic will find a way (but giving it a push never hurts)**

Forming a bond as a group and developing trust and respect is a very important part of a Citizens’ Jury. The Jurors need to be able to work together to produce recommendations at the end of the process and these usually require negotiation and debate. Moving the event online removed all the usual avenues people have for bonding – chatting over coffee or lunch, grabbing a drink at the end of the day…and we were concerned this would impact the group and the process.

In the event, a second WhatsApp group was formed by the Jurors, specifically to enable them to chat during the day and into the evening. They shared thoughts about what they were hearing, the changes they wanted to see brought about, what they were having for dinner, pictures of their pets and by the time they came to make recommendations they were working incredibly well together.

Alongside this, we had included half an hour at the start and an hour at the end of every day for them to spend as a group with the facilitator, so that he could work with them and support them towards working as a team. A good facilitator is essential and will make all the difference to the event.

**By being online, you’re making things much easier for a lot of people**

When we were first discussing moving the Citizens’ Jury online we were concerned that we would have lots of people drop out, that no-one would want to participate in something so intense from home, and that part of the appeal would be meeting others, maybe staying in a hotel, and having time to focus specifically on being a Juror.

In the event, our concerns were completely unfounded. We had 125 people register to take part and no one dropped out because we moved the event online. Several of the Jurors also commented that they would not have been able to participate had it been an in-person event that required them to be in Cardiff for 5 days.

While everyone agreed that meeting would have been really nice, the general consensus was that meeting in advance, for the prep day, perhaps, and then meeting at the end, would have been enough. It’s difficult to know what effect this would have had on the dynamic, but certainly, for future events, if this was possible, this would be the model we would likely use.

Overall, the Online Citizens’ Jury went very well; our Jurors did an amazing job processing so much information and then producing 16 clear and compelling recommendations. You can find the report including the recommendations at [www.mtm.wales/resources](http://www.mtm.wales/resources) and if you visit YouTube and search ‘Measuring the Mountain’ you can find recordings of all the sessions. Our hope is that these become a valuable resource for people wanting to learn more about what really matters in care and support service delivery in Wales.