

Guidelines for an online Doctorate Research Support Group

Guide to setting up

Participation

Ideally, try to find students in your school or department at a similar stage in the research process as yourself. Groups of 3-4 seem to work best. Try contacting the Director of Teaching & Learning (Postgraduate) for your school to see if he/she knows of other doctoral students who might be interested. Or use the matching service provided by Student Learning Development - [application form](#)

Once you are matched with 2-3 others, one person needs to take responsibility to email everyone and arrange a date for the group to meet initially. Use the following suggestions.

Practicalities

If meeting online, you will need an internet connection, speakers/headphone, microphone, webcam.

The group needs to decide which Video Call software to use: Skype, Zoom, MSTeams, WhatsApp, Google Hangouts.

For Skype: Each group member should download the Skype app and create an account. Full instructions for getting up and running are available in this [online tutorial](#).

For Zoom: The free version only lasts 40 minutes but you can re-connect. Instructions for getting started are available in this [online tutorial](#).

It is recommended that groups meet a minimum of once a month. Of course, the group can meet more often if all members agree! It's advised to schedule an hour for the meeting; again, members may decide a longer period is needed. Also, the group could have a What's App group for less formal chat between meetings, if all are agreeable and don't feel that it would be too much.

First meeting

Discuss and set boundaries for the group. For example,

- the importance of confidentiality
- agree to listen actively and not interrupt
- the importance of respecting each other's views
- who will moderate or 'chair' each group meeting. This can rotate or be set for a fixed period of time
- How to resolve possible conflicts or problems.

The group will also need to agree a structure which can be flexible. However, here are some examples from the University of Sussex:

- Each member has the opportunity to share with the group what they have been doing on their PhD in the preceding month. This is an interactive process, with other members being able to comment and ask questions. Talking about one's PhD in an informal, trusted environment can be very useful for sorting out issues and increasing confidence.

- There is also an opportunity for members to talk about their supervision, anything that they are finding particularly challenging, and to share their worries and concerns.
- At the end of each meeting a date should be agreed for the following month (Durrant, 2020, p.6).

If more structure is desired, group members can agree at the start of the meeting what they want to cover or even a week before.

Be supportive and not judgemental – there's plenty of that around!

Evaluation

Group members are advised to monitor and evaluate how the group is working on a regular basis. In addition, SLD will send a short questionnaire after a few months regarding the online support group.

Contact

If you have any questions or issues, please contact student.learning@tcd.ie.