The Bristol and Bath group of Cambridge Alumni recently held our first virtual event, a quiz evening, which seemed to be enjoyed by all. I’ve put together a guide to planning your own, including some tips from our experience. A set of off-the-peg quiz questions is also available to make it easy!

**What format of quiz? How long an event?**

As a basic format, you have lots of questions divided into several rounds. Do you want to make it a real social whole-evening event with time for chat and a long break in the middle for eating? Do you want to do a short quiz that might be a regular weekly offering? You could even make it a family event, with different rounds aimed at the adults and the children.

We decided on an early evening (7 pm) event, and said it would last one and a half to two hours. By luck and a bit of judgement it lasted just over one and a half hours including introductions and a bit of chat. That was 6 rounds of ten questions, including a fifteen minute picture round in the middle which also functioned as a break. But we had some feedback that the start was too early for people who had been working, so we may try a little later next time.

**Who will set the questions and who will act as Quizmaster?**

If you don’t already have questions ready, someone may enjoy thinking them up from scratch, or there are lots of quiz sites on the internet. Do you want to stick to ordinary quiz questions, or do you want to make it more like a pub-quiz-with-paper-aeroplane-round, so include things like a scavenger hunt, or a craft round (particularly if you’re aiming at families). Music rounds are popular (although think whether you have the right technology), and picture rounds have the practical advantage that they can act as a refreshment / comfort break in the middle. The level of difficulty is quite hard to judge, at least the first time. Unless it’s billed as being really challenging, then I think good advice is to aim for every team to get at least half of each round right, so perhaps have around half the questions at the easier end of the spectrum and include at least a couple of more / very difficult ones. It sounds obvious, but a broad spread of topics will allow everyone to play to their strengths. The same person may set the questions and then ask them at the event, but of course the two could be separate tasks.

I revised some questions that I already had from doing a quiz evening, and made them easier, mainly as they were originally intended for a team event and I wasn’t sure how many people would be entering on their own. In the event I probably made them too easy, as most of the scores were 8 -10 out of ten – I should have realised that would be the case with an event aimed at Cambridge alumni!

**When? Day of the week, date and time**

You may decide to use a slot that had already been advertised with an alumni group event, you may make an executive decision as an organiser or as an organising committee, or you could do a poll of everyone who registers to check what would be convenient.

We did a Doodle poll of the group organisers, and took that as a likely indication of when people might be available, and then just advertised the quiz as being on that date and time.

**What Platform and who will host it? How will you help people unsure about the technology?**

What digital platform will you use to host it? Two months ago, many people wouldn’t have even known what a digital platform was, but these days far more people are conversant with various different meeting formats. It’s still worth thinking about whether the technology might be difficult for anyone who might want to participate and who might need support. Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Hangouts or Google Meets are all possibilities. You might want to make sure that the platform can be accessed using a mobile if necessary. Someone needs to set up the meeting. This could be the Quizmaster, but it could be someone else.

We decided to use Microsoft Teams as you don’t need to download anything beforehand. As I’d never set up a meeting before, my husband actually did that bit and the hands-on opening of the meeting and screen-
sharing. We also arranged a try-out meeting the previous evening for ten minutes when anyone who felt unsure about the technology could join to check it out in advance.

**Will you offer to put people into “remote” teams?**
If people are on their own, you can offer to put them into a remote team with others. You can leave them to decide on their own means of secondary communication during the quiz among themselves, or if you have someone who is knowledgeable, you can offer to help if necessary.

We had five people wanting to be in a remote team, and two seemed too few for a team, so I left them as a five, but because the questions were pitched a little too easy, in retrospect I think a two and a three would have been better. We put them in touch by email, and they decided to use a WhatsApp videocall to communicate during the quiz. Another self-organised remote team of two households used a phone call to consult with each other.

**Who will organise registrations and communications?**
The first thing is to invite alumni to take part in your quiz. This could be a separate email, or part of your regular communications. Decide how much you need to say about the quiz to explain it and make it attractive! There should be a clear way of registering to take part in the quiz. Someone needs to collate registrations and then communicate with participants. You can create a simple registration “form” or you can just ask people to register by sending an email. Think about what information you need to know.

We created a registration form using Google Forms, which automatically tabulates the answers and can be shared with all organisers. We asked for: name; email address; were they entering by themselves or on behalf of a team, or did they want to be put into a remote team; and were they confident about joining a Teams meeting and communicating with their teammates, or might they need some support?

When you have the information on who has registered, you’ll need to send them an email giving a few more details – for example about the length of quiz, the format, and the fact that they will be getting an invitation to the “meeting” for the quiz (and to the tech try-out beforehand, if you decide to do that – make sure the meetings invitation messages are clearly labelled as to what they are for!) You might consider putting the email address or mobile number of the meeting organiser which people can use if they encounter technical difficulties on the night.

**Holding the meeting and Presenting the Quiz**
Whoever is organising technically will need to let participants in to the meeting. It is really helpful if you are able to share screens, for picture rounds, Powerpoints (see below) and scoring, but you could simply hold something up to the camera if necessary! Make sure you have everything ready, whether in physical or virtual form, such as: the list of participants you’re expecting, the list of questions, and the list of answers, a table for noting scores, any pictures, presentations, music files etc. Decide who is doing what – the Quizmaster may deal with everything, or you may divide the tasks among different people. The Quizmaster will probably act as “host”, saying hello and explaining the format of the event. You will want to ask everyone to mute their microphones if they aren’t speaking. As you are likely to have teams of different sizes, and some doing remote consulting, it’s quite difficult to tell if you are pacing the questions appropriately, so it is worth checking with participants after three or four questions.

*I read each question twice at a moderate pace, and then left a pause. Another pause at the end of each round, and then we went through the answers to that round. However, on the experienced advice of my daughter, I had also prepared a Powerpoint with all the questions coming up one by one (and then the same with the answers), and we shared the screen. For the picture round, all the pictures were on one slide, and we left that up for fifteen minutes. The Powerpoint took some time to prepare, but it was universally well received when I asked for feedback, as it overcame any audio problems and there was no need for teams to ask for questions to be repeated, and it also meant that one of the remote teams using a parallel video call could all turn off their audio apart from one of them, so that they didn’t get terrible feedback. There was also a comment that it made the event look “polished”!* 

**Think about Scoring and (whisper it) Cheating**
You could just have the event for personal satisfaction and not bother with collecting scores, but generally participants will expect teams to report their scores and have a winner at the end. The person keeping score
could be the Quizmaster, the meeting organiser or someone else entirely, and it can be done by hand and reported verbally, or on a pre-prepared table that can produce a running total and can be shared on screen at the end of each round.

Realistically, in this sort of event, there’s nothing you can do to stop people Googling the answer, so you can only rely on their honour as Cambridge alumni! If you really feel you need to limit the possibilities of cheating, there are various things you can do, such as asking them to “swap” photos of their answers to be marked by another team, or send their answers to the organisers to mark, or as a check, or indeed to use Google Forms to record their answers so you can see them. But is it really worth it? Especially if there’s no prize involved but the honour of winning! (Or a common format is for the winner to set the questions for the next quiz…)

We had each team mark their own as the answers were read, and then report the scores team by team at the end of the round.

**What sort of atmosphere do you want for the quiz?**

You can keep it quite business like, but if you want to create more of a sociable feel there are various things you can do, for example suggesting people might like to furnish themselves with snacks or drinks, having a theme to the event, asking teams to introduce themselves at the beginning, or building in some sort of break where people can chat.

We could have asked people to report their scores by typing in the chat function, but we decided it would make it seem more like a social event if we heard people talking, so we asked them to give their scores verbally at the end of each round, although if the number of teams is large this may be problematic. The remote team who had been put together said they enjoyed the chance to chat in the picture round / break in the middle.

I hope you feel inspired to have a go – we’re thinking we’ll have another one in a few weeks!