Getting to grips with a virtual placement

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As three final year students, we collaborated to prepare and present virtual speech, language and communication needs training via Microsoft Teams recordings and pre-recorded video, to teaching assistants in a mainstream school, over a period of eight weeks. The training sessions aimed to provide a foundation of knowledge in speech, language, social communication, selective mutism and stammering.

We learnt how to work remotely as a group and prepare and record Teams presentations. We also learnt how to pre-record, edit videos and upload them to SharePoint for other users. Delivering to a camera, where errors can be re-watched or kept for perpetuity, can be intimidating. But condensing three years' worth of learning into five 45-minute sessions with accompanying PowerPoints was a valuable experience for clarifying what we had studied. It was also really beneficial to work alongside education professionals. We were able to administer assessments, set targets and then offer therapy sessions. Our clinical knowledge has improved as we put theory into practice – learning how to train education professionals was an invaluable experience.

We worked out how to deliver complex information in an accessible fashion, what was necessary (and interesting) for the audience to know and finding ways to present these with accompanying visuals. It was a good working environment once we got into the flow of the project. We delivered different sections of the training week-by-week, checking in with each other, our educator, and the staff at the school.

We came up with creative ways to boost staff engagement and interaction. As a group, we added small reflection tasks, videos, or interactive elements to the presentations. Initially there were tech challenges, such as getting used to SharePoint and multiple Teams accounts. Additionally, wifi and laptop problems often meant dropped calls and documents failing to load, but overall it was a great learning experience.

Our advice for students going on a similar placement:

- Take time to front-load a lot of the pre-project organisation and planning and appreciate how much this organisation is a valuable part of the project. This involves familiarising yourself with new technology or software, setting up a plan for how you will share and approach the work, and how and when you will approach admin and scheduling.
- Make the most of software available to you, such as Microsoft To Do lists or Teams calendars.
- Get used to scheduling in your time formally with tools that work for you (and remember that scheduling your week also takes up time in your schedule!)

- Be realistic about how much time you are going to give to the project – when you are working at home on university studies, it is very easy to slip into working at home on placement projects as well.
- Have a plan for what you will do when things go wrong or when you have wifi problems and take it in your stride. These things will happen, so maintain a friendly, professional attitude when they do.
- Keep anonymised copies of the materials and feedback for your Standards of Proficiency Portfolio.

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