RSC hybrid events in 2022

This paper outlines the RSC Events team's approach for running centrally organised events in 2022 and describes the various format options we believe best reflect the needs of our audience. We hope that this information (particularly the table of hybrid format options) will be of use to Member Networks when deciding on how to run their own events. This document is based on the best information we have in January 2022, and we are aware of the need for on-going agility in adapting our to changing market conditions.

When can we return to in-person attendance, and what will this look like?

Understandably, there are areas of uncertainty around events in 2022, so we have had to make some planning assumptions for our centrally organised events. Research undertaken by the RSC and by industry partners indicates that there is a growing intention to return to in-person attendance at scientific events, but our plans need to be adaptable to change. We are working on the assumption that when a return to in-person events is feasible*, we are likely to see a lower footfall in physical attendance at conferences and symposia than pre-pandemic levels during the first year. We are therefore treating 2022 as a period of recovery for physical events, and where possible, we are taking a hybrid approach to enabling delegate attendance.

The core principles we are operating on are:

- Where an event can be successfully run virtually, it will remain online
- Where an event cannot achieve maximum success in terms of delegate experience**, we will plan for it to be hybrid where possible
- There will be exceptions where an event must be in-person, but these are limited in number.

What is 'hybrid' for centrally organised events in 2022?

Event organisers across the industry are still defining the hybrid event model, but delegates do want both physical and virtual attendance options. We are therefore working to this definition of hybrid for our 2022 events:

- Attendees will have the option to participate either in-person, or virtually
- For events where a delegate fee is charged, virtual attendance will be at a lower price to in-person attendance (this assumption is supported the market research)
- Where possible, virtual attendees will have access to recorded content (both real-time and for a period after the event), plus remote participation during the event
- Anything that a virtual delegate gets, is also provided to an in-person attendee – e.g., post-event access to content will also be provided to in-person attendees.

We are keen to stress that - like the rest of the events industry - we are in a discovery phase, and these principles do not necessarily represent a perfect delegate experience. Hybrid will provide new challenges, particularly around the networking divide between physical and virtual delegates. In 2022, we may experiment with services that modify this aspect of hybrid (e.g., to try out new virtual networking services). In the following table, we outline our hybrid approach for each event type, noting the pros and cons, and indicating mitigating steps we plan to take where possible.

*At the time of writing, most RSC events with a physical component are planned for after Easter 2022.

** Most events that cannot take place purely virtually tend to comprise elements of networking, discussion and collaboration, which market research indicates have lower audience expectations for virtual vs in-person.

Hybrid format options

Hybrid format and technology solution	Event formats	Advantages	Disadvantages	Mitigating steps
Live event with participation from audience in person and online. Dedicated conferencing platform featuring delegate-managed networking, single or parallel sessions, breakout rooms, abstracts, and posters - Live interaction with virtual audience	Scientific conference or symposium (one day or multi-day) with networking – may include posters	- Audience accessibility - Posters can be presented - Q&A can be managed live, with virtual delegates participation on screen in Q&A - Speakers can be in person or online	- Technology cost per delegate can be prohibitive - Time invested to learn and use technology - Networking for online delegates is considered less successful	- Train staff to run events using dedicated conferencing platform - Consider networking apps to bring physical and virtual delegates together
Live event with participation from audience in person and online. Webinar platform (e.g., Zoom Webinar or GoToWebinar) - Broadcast of content to virtual audience with limited live interaction	- Scientific conference or symposium (one day or multi-day) with networking – may include posters - Lecture - Seminar - Panel discussion or report launch	- Relatively affordable technology compared with conference platforms - Requires minimal training to use - Reliable and stable technology - Virtual audience can participate	- Virtual delegates experience limited (e.g., panellists on screen only) - Limited networking options which need to be managed by organisers - Less polished delivery especially for in-person speakers viewed virtually - No integrated poster option	- Consider using Twitter to run poster sessions (RSC Events can provide guidance if needed events@rsc.org) - Consider using Slack to manage Q&A (a co-chair for sessions is recommended to field questions)
Pre-recorded event with live in person participation, recorded to be viewed by an online audience after the event (e.g., on YouTube) Webinar platform (e.g., Zoom Webinar or GoToWebinar or filmed if all speakers are in person). No live virtual audience interaction	- Lecture - Seminar - Panel discussion or report launch	- Easier to manage than live events - Online aspects can be edited prior to upload - Relatively affordable technology compared with conference platforms	- Virtual audience can watch proceedings but not participate live	- Consider giving as much information as possible about presentation(s) in advance, and invite questions advance from online audience - Consider establishing an online forum to engage online audience before and after event