

King's Digital Education

Guidance for Digital Educational Activities

1. Overview

King's College London is proud to foster an environment where critical thinking and vibrant debate is encouraged. King's is committed to protecting the dignity of its students and staff in their learning and participation in university life, and in their interactions with others.

All students and staff have the right to expect good conduct and professional behaviour from others and have a corresponding responsibility to behave professionally and with good conduct towards others. Digital activities including online communications must in all ways meet the conditions of the university's policies concerning dignity, equality, diversity, inclusion, safeguarding, communications, and respect. For further information, see the university's statement entitled: [Freedom of Expression](#).

If you undertake an online or blended learning programme at King's College London, we ask that you commit to participating fully in the activities which are set, and in return we will provide a supportive and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Whilst King's is committed to a safe and civil environment for the exchange of ideas and the cultivation of knowledge, you should demonstrate open-mindedness and tolerance and expect to challenge and be challenged in protecting the freedom of expression within UK law.

In an online or blended learning course, the activities involved and the way you communicate can be quite different to a face-to-face course. We have provided the guidance below to help ensure that your online interactions are enjoyable and conducive to a successful learning journey.

2. Synchronous educational activities

Synchronous educational activities including discussion forums and text chat in live seminars come with challenges such as not being able to gauge the body language and tone of voice of the person who is communicating. Here are some suggestions:

- 2.1. If possible, have your camera on, with the background blurred or a template applied. Being able to be seen by others fosters a sense of community as well as provides many other benefits including:

- an enhanced teaching experience
- Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Wellbeing benefits (see [Appendix 1](#))
- many other Educational benefits (see [Appendix 2](#))

Be aware though that not everyone has the ability (due to technical or other reasons) to appear on camera and no one should feel under pressure to do so. A request for a camera to be switched on may be interpreted as a microaggression; similarly, not having a camera on may also be interpreted as a microaggression.

- 2.2. Written text can be easily misinterpreted without the usual clues we have when speaking face-to face. Avoid the use of strong or offensive language, and adopt a respectful and inclusive tone, even when disagreeing with others.

- 2.3. There are some common online communication conventions.
Do: use Team's 'emojis' to react. Thumbs up, smiley faces etc. are useful for fostering engagement. Unrelated emojis/emoticons meanings can be unclear or misinterpreted.
Do not: TYPE IN CAPS. This is regarded as shouting and is out of place in a classroom.
- 2.4. Read your message carefully before posting or sending it to try to ensure it will be interpreted as you intended. One good way to do this is to read your message out loud to see if it flows smoothly.
- 2.5. If you perceive something as offensive it is possible that the speaker or writer did not intend this. You should attempt to resolve any issues informally with the relevant person at the earliest opportunity by polite discussion, or by involving the facilitator. The facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the tone of the discussion is respectful and inclusive. If polite discussion does not work students may choose to follow the [Complaints Procedure](#).
- 2.6. Stay safe online. See appendix 3: [Staying safe online throughout your studies](#)
- 2.7. Misuse of digital materials, including unauthorised dissemination of them, will be treated as misconduct and will be handled through the appropriate disciplinary process.

3. Online Synchronous Seminars, Small Group Sessions, 1:1s etc – set up

Many online and blended learning programmes involve the use of Microsoft Teams. This provides a more interactive online learning experience as you will be able to communicate with other students and academic staff in real-time. Here are some useful tips which can help make the forum or seminar run more smoothly:

- 3.1. Log into the session in good time to make sure that you have your audio and video set up before the session starts. This includes blurring or applying a template to the camera's background. Making multiple adjustments during the session can be distracting to other students and the facilitator.
- 3.2. Turn off other devices during the session. For example, having a phone ring will be distracting for everyone. A mobile phone in close proximity to your microphone can also cause noise interference.
- 3.3. Try to find a quiet location to participate in the session and avoid making too much background noise, such as rustling papers. If you are in a busy or noisy location, consider using headphones with an inbuilt microphone to minimise background noise.
- 3.4. Speak clearly, and do not speak over people or interrupt. Use the options provided by the online tool e.g. raising your hand or using the chat function.
- 3.5. Mute your microphone when not speaking as this can cause echo and interference. Try not to forget to unmute yourself when you have something to say!
- 3.6. The person leading the session should outline the preferred etiquette at the start around cameras, hands up, chat etc. and state that they are mindful that this is the preference and not everyone will be able or comfortable to follow this.

4. Online Synchronous Seminars, Small Group Sessions, 1:1s etc – conduct

King's College London is committed to protecting the dignity of its students and staff in their learning and participation in university life, and in their interactions with others. All students and staff have the right to expect good conduct and professional behaviour from others and have a corresponding responsibility to behave professionally and with good conduct towards others.

- 4.1. Treat your facilitator and other students with respect. Comments or images (including your own) that would be inappropriate in a face-to-face environment are also inappropriate online.
- 4.2. Digital materials and content should be appropriate for under 18s as far as practical, see the [Safeguarding](#) pages for further information and guidance.
 - 4.2.1. In certain circumstances it may be appropriate to show material of an adult nature (for example, playing a clip of an 18 certificate film) as an essential means of achieving desired learning outcomes.
 - 4.2.2. Students who are aged under the age of 18 on entry to the university are required to have their parent/legal guardian sign an Agreement to Study form, one of the declarations that they agree to is the understanding that their child/dependent is entering an adult learning environment. If you are unsure about any digital material or content or if you have a student who is under the age of 16, please seek advice from your Faculty Designated Safeguarding Officer.
- 4.3. If your programme is conducted in English you should always post contributions in English to enable everyone to understand, unless specifically requested to do otherwise.
- 4.4. Small groups (15 or less) should aim for everyone to have their cameras on and give apologies if they cannot.
- 4.5. For larger groups only active speakers should have their camera on, with everyone else keeping their camera off until invited to speak/turn it on.
- 4.6. Ensure you only post messages that are related to the discussion and avoid posting the same message multiple times ('spam').
- 4.7. Be careful to only share content that you have a right to make available.
- 4.8. Avoid taking discussion threads off-topic or make off-topic posts within threads. Off-topic posts may be removed at our discretion.
- 4.9. Any and all complaints directed at a moderating decision should first be addressed to the moderator in question via private message.
- 4.10. For content management purposes, threads may be closed for further comment but remain viewable. This would usually be because the discussion in the thread is not moving along, users are not covering new points, or the discussion is going around in circles. Whether the discussion is interesting or motivates participation in the context of the forum subject matter also factors into the closure of a thread decision.
- 4.11. Messages sent in the course of the programme should only be shared with the permission from the sender, unless requested to by an administrator for site administration purposes.
- 4.12. KEATS or other King's College London online learning spaces should not be used to advertise products or services for profit or gain.

5. Online Synchronous Large Events – conduct

Cameras should only be on for active speakers. Others should keep their cameras off until invited to speak or turn it on, e.g. to ask a question or when invited to at the beginning or end of the session so everyone can see the wider group.

6. Recording of Educational Activities

- 6.1. Not all educational activities should be recorded.
- 6.2. Lectures, by default, are set to be recorded.
 - 6.2.1. This will automatically be undertaken when using Echo360 for physical sessions and the session appropriately labelled in the time tabling system.
 - 6.2.2. Online Microsoft Teams meeting sessions, the lecturer will be required to start the recording.
- 6.3. Small group teaching such as seminars, practicals, tutorials and 1:1s are not expected to be recorded unless the Academic feels there is an educational benefit in doing so.
- 6.4. Students should not be recording sessions.
- 6.5. Details around consent to be recorded and to use recordings can be found in the [Digital Education Policy](#).

7. Notes & related policies

This guidance refers to the use of King's core, recommended and recognised technologies. However, students and staff who engage in digital activities should also understand that what would be unacceptable in a physical environment is also unacceptable in an online environment and would lead to misconduct proceedings. Staff and students are subject to the regulations and policies below and are required to act in accordance with them.

- [Digital Education Policy](#)
- Social Media Communications Policy and guidance
- [IT Acceptable Use Policy](#) and its related policies
- [Academic Regulations](#)
- Your faculty handbook If relevant your professional body guidelines, e.g. General Dental Council, The Law Society, etc.

8. Appendix 1

On-Camera: Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Wellbeing

Considerations for remote work and study

The move to remote work and study has meant we are using video calls more than ever before as part of our daily lives. When working and studying, there are many benefits to going on camera rather than relying exclusively on audio calls. However, the decision whether to go on camera whilst working and studying remotely is easier for some to make than others.

It is encouraged that staff and students go on camera whilst working and studying, where they can, where it is appropriate, and where it is safe for them to do so. This guidance aims to help staff and students understand the benefits and barriers for some to going on camera, to enable them to make personal informed decisions and to respect and support the decisions of others.

Tackling isolation

For some, coming onto campus for work or study is one of few opportunities to socialise and see others. Increased remote working for those who do not live with family and friends can lead to a sense of isolation and be detrimental to wellbeing. Going on camera can help mimic these face-to-face interactions and provide a richer, contextualised experience.

Supporting wellbeing

For teams, classes and groups that work remotely all of the time, online interactions are the only opportunity for teaching staff, tutors and managers to be able to see the staff and students they are working with. Without seeing an individual, it can be quite difficult to get a sense of how they are doing, and if they are ok. Going on camera, even if for limited periods, can allow emotional and behavioural cues to be read, improve understanding of an individual's needs, and enable them to receive wellbeing support from those around them.

Lip-reading

Those who rely on lip reading for communication will require others to use the camera to participate. Lip reading is commonly used by those who have hearing loss or are D/deaf. Lip reading also has benefits for those who have auditory processing disorder (APD) or a learning difference with an auditory element (such as auditory processing dyslexia).

One workaround for those who do not wish to be on camera is to show only the lower half of the face. However, only around 30-35% of English sounds can be lip-read easily as the sounds are formed on the lips and/or in front of the mouth. The other sounds are interpreted based on body language, context cues, and the individuals understanding of the spoken language.

Lip reading on camera is, therefore, best facilitated allowing for the display of facial expressions and body language to enable the reader to utilise all the information being presented to them to understand what is being said.

Closed captions can be used to support and facilitate this; however, it should be noted that automated captions are not always accurate and should not be exclusively relied upon to transfer information.

Neurodiversity

Going on camera relies on an individual's ability to make eye contact with a lens and sit still in a fixed position to participate. For some, this requirement will be for multiple hours a day as they work and study. Staff and students who are neurodiverse, such as those who are autistic, dyspraxic or have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may find the requirement to frequently appear on camera difficult and may use not being on camera as an opportunity to move around or be more flexible in their working environment.

Disability and Equality Act 2010

It is important to note that under the Equality Act 2010, King's College London has a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments to enable disabled staff and students to participate in work and study. This requirement is anticipatory, in that we should aim to embed the inclusion of disabled people into our universal practices and ways of working, to remove the need for adjustments.

Where there is a need for a disabled individual to have an adjustment, this supersedes other's individual needs. **This means if there is a clash of individual needs, the needs of the disabled individual must be prioritised.** An adjustment can mean disabled staff and students are treated more favourably than their peers.

Staff and students who have an access requirement should inform their line manager, supervisor, personal tutor, or course lead. Where a staff member or a student requests someone to be on camera for accessibility reasons, this is expected to be accommodated where no alternative solution can be found. Students may wish to contact Disability Support to discuss any concerns they have about engaging digitally and the wider support options available.

Religious or cultural dress

It is common for those who choose to dress modestly or wear head coverings for religious or cultural purposes to dress differently inside their homes and amongst family. Whilst working and studying from home, it is therefore likely that these individuals will choose not to wear a head covering, or full cultural dress.

The requirement to be on camera can therefore provide an additional level of formality, and the need to dress as if outside of the home. This level of formality is not experienced by other staff and students, who will not feel they have to modify their choice of clothing to be able to participate in remote work or study.

It can be tiresome and have a detrimental impact to an individual's wellbeing to not feel that they can work and study comfortably within their own home, and to feel that they have to frequently remove or put on particular garments throughout the day to do so.

Not using the camera when studying or working remotely can therefore enable a staff member or student to participate whilst dressed comfortably in a way that reflects their culture or meets their religious requirements.

Some staff may choose to wear head coverings whilst teaching, working, or studying remotely so that they can support other's access requirements, or experience the benefits of using the camera. Scheduling meetings in advance and avoiding impromptu meetings can enable these staff members to plan, giving additional flexibility, and avoiding the need for a sudden change of dress.

Parenting and caring responsibilities

Staff and students who have parenting and caring responsibilities may prefer to be off-camera to enable the privacy of those they live with and to minimise potential distractions. Parenting and caring responsibilities can often create the need for more flexibility, or the potential for unexpected interruptions, regardless of if there are others around to help. In unexpected times of need, being off-camera can enable parents and carers to help their dependents, and deal with situations, whilst remaining on the call and not disrupting others.

If you are leading a class, meeting or workshop, letting participants know that you recognise they are working or studying from home and that there may be interruptions, other people or children around, or the need for flexibility can help encourage people to feel comfortable on camera.

Shared living space

For many, the move to remote work and study has led to desk setups in kitchens, bedrooms and living rooms. People who share their home with family members, friends or housemates may wish to avoid going on camera to improve the privacy of others within their home and avoid inadvertently sharing them on screen.

Home décor and personal identity

Most video call software, such as Microsoft Teams, have the option to blur or change the video background so that individuals are put in focus and their surroundings are hidden. This option can enable those who wish for additional privacy to participate on camera. When facilitating, one option is to ask everyone to get creative with their backgrounds, or to all use the same background when on camera.

9. Appendix 2

Educational benefits of camera use

Almost all educators agree that *seeing* their students enables them to teach better – even though they wouldn't want to *insist* that students turn their cameras on. Here are some of the benefits they mention:

- Teaching at King's is interactive; educators strive to teach every student. On campus, educators 'read the room' to detect unspoken reactions – non-verbal cues such as puzzlement, humour, frustration, worry, energy levels. Then they can respond, whether to check understanding or change their teaching strategy. Students turning on their cameras brings some of this potential for online teaching.
- Being able to see the face of whomever is speaking helps with understanding. This particularly benefits educators who lip read, but many of us rely (more than we realise) on expressions and gestures to provide extra context – particularly if a student is expressing complicated ideas.
- Being able to gauge if students are ready to move on.

Being able to see each other is also likely to benefit students in the following ways:

- Visual presence – seeing fellow students listening and responding can help with focus and a sense of togetherness. It can reduce isolation.
- Online when somebody is speaking, videos enable active listening through focused expressions and gestures like nodding. This may encourage students to speak. It is probably easier to share something vulnerable when those you are sharing it with are not hidden from you.
- Being visibly present may help some students who are struggling with distractions (particularly digital distractions).
- As above being able to see the face of whomever is speaking helps with understanding what they are saying – particularly useful in contexts where many students have English as an acquired language.

What if some people find the video distracting?

While video brings all of these benefits for some, others find the movements in the tiles unbearably distracting. Fortunately, Teams Meeting gives some configurable options which enable each participant to individually filter out what distracts them. For example, it is possible to hide others' video just for yourself. That way everyone who wants to see each other can do so, and everyone who finds that distracting can hide it (the same goes for the chat too).

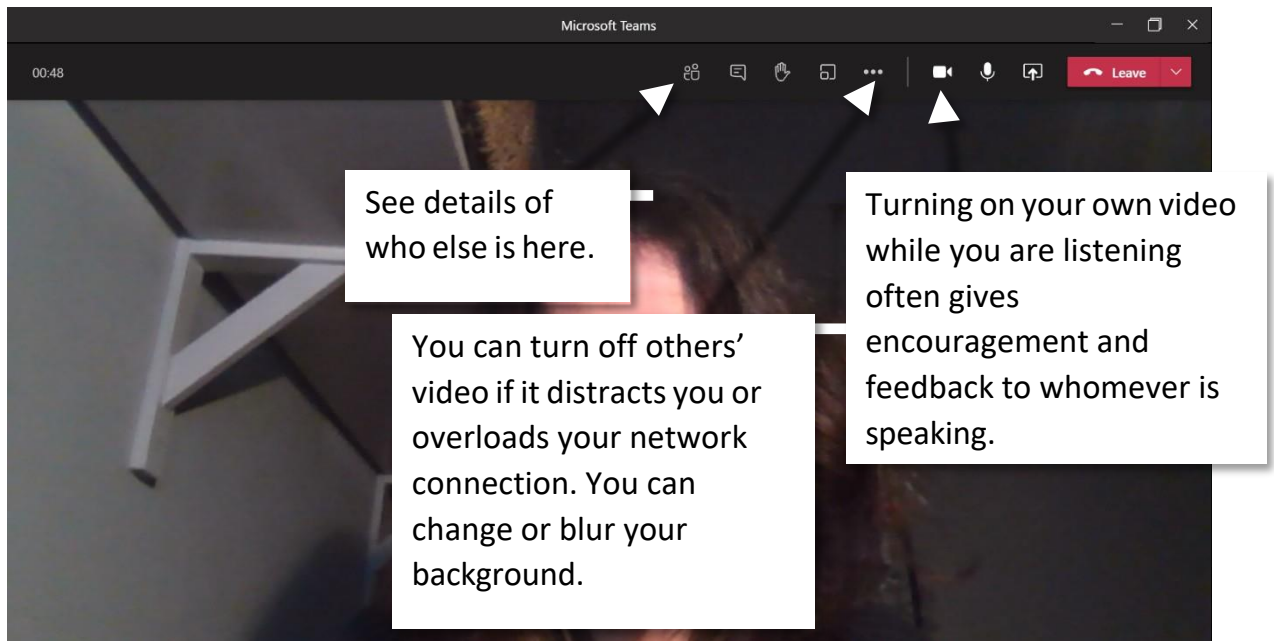


Figure 1 Screenshot of the Microsoft Teams Meeting interface showing how to configure incoming video and your own camera

What if students remain reluctant to turn on their cameras?

Even with cameras on, educators would need to draw on a range of strategies to give students the opportunity to work with their new knowledge, to check understanding, and to generally draw students out.

- Breakout groups. With clear purpose and instructions, breakout groups give students a chance to apply their knowledge, test their ideas and gain awareness of how other students go about their studies. Students who keep their cameras off in plenary may wish to turn them on in a smaller group.
A dedicated breakout room can be utilised for those who cannot/do not want to turn on cameras if requested in advance.
- Padlet or PollEverywhere. Particularly useful in live sessions where students can be asked to make a prediction, answer a knowledge question, vote in a poll, contribute an idea, or post a minute paper, for example. If posts are public, then consider making them anonymous to draw out more diffident students.
- KEATS Quiz or Assignment. These can fulfil the same purposes as Padlet and PollEverywhere above, but in private, potentially asynchronously and in a way which allows educators to see who has and has not participated.

10. Appendix 3

Staying safe online throughout your studies

King's College London is committed to protecting the dignity of its students and staff in their learning and participation in university life, and in their interactions with others. All students and staff have the right to expect good conduct and professional behaviour from others and have a corresponding responsibility to behave professionally and with good conduct towards others. Online communications must in all ways meet the conditions of the university's policies concerning communications, dignity, equality, diversity, inclusion, and respect.

Staying safe online at King's

When participating in any discussion forum, live seminar, or other online meeting (e.g. with a personal tutor or student support services), please take account of the following in order to keep yourselves and others safe:

- Treat your facilitator and other students with respect. Comments or images that would be inappropriate in a face-to-face environment are also inappropriate online.
- Language must always be professional and appropriate, including other members of your household who may be in the background.
- When using cameras, the background should be blurred or a template should be used. Be mindful of your surroundings and use an appropriate room for video calling.
- When on a video call you must wear suitable clothing, as should anyone else in the household visible on the call.
- If a video call is to be recorded, all participants must be notified at the start of the session.
- Photographs or screenshots of a video call must only be taken with verbal consent.
- If screens are shared at any point, the individual must ensure that all extraneous tabs or browsers have been shut down.
- If your programme is conducted in English you should always post contributions in English to enable everyone to understand, unless specifically requested to do otherwise.
- Ensure you only post messages that are related to the discussion and avoid posting the same message multiple times ('spam').
- Be careful to only share content that you have a right to make available.
- Messages sent in the course of the programme should only be shared with the permission from the sender, unless requested to by an administrator for site administration purposes.
- KEATS or other King's College London online learning spaces should not be used to advertise products or services for profit or gain.

Further information can be found within the [Essential Digital Skills programme](#)

Staying safe when using social media and other online services

When using social media and other online services, you should think about how this activity could impact on your life (and the lives of others) outside of the online world. We recommend taking the following steps:

Protect your reputation. Consider how future employers may perceive your content and comments and bear in mind the permanence of what your post. Language, nudity and activities considered or interpreted to be offensive or antisocial may impact on your employability.

Avoid criminal activity. Abusive behaviour, bullying and 'trolling' can be illegal in some instances and may lead to criminal charges. Behaviour that is perceived by individuals to be hostile or prejudiced towards themselves or others based on perceived or actual race, religion, gender, sexuality or disability could be considered a hate crime or hate incident [Metropolitan Police].

Think about what you post. Posting content obtained through deception or breaching the privacy of others (such as secretly-filmed video or content shared with you privately through apps) not only causes pain and embarrassment to others, but may also be considered illegal.

Keep your details private. Posting personal details such as your address, regular locations or student card can make you vulnerable to identity theft and other crimes. Always avoid putting your personal safety or that of others at risk. Security settings on social media can change, so review your privacy settings regularly.

Take reasonable measures to prevent the transmission of computer viruses, such as not opening email attachments received from unsolicited sources.

Maintain professional standards. Sharing social media content about your workplace and individuals while on placement, work experience or working in a healthcare setting may conflict with data protection legislation, non-disclosure agreements or impact on the position of a company or organisation in the marketplace. You should never assume that you have consent to share personal information on any social platform (including closed groups and messaging services).

Keep passwords secure. Make sure passwords are strong, and never share them with anyone else. Don't leave your computer unlocked with your social media or other sensitive accounts logged in. If you log into social media accounts on your phone, make sure you have a passcode set up on it.