THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Build it and they probably won't come

Exploring remote and hybrid engagement strategies in the GLAMA (galleries, libraries, archives, museums and academia) sector

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About the authors

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Executive summary

Overview

This report seeks to reflect the current state of remote and hybrid academic engagement activities in the GLAMA sector (galleries, libraries, archives, museums and academia), following the shift to greater online delivery after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It captures the experiences of those involved in co-ordinating remote and hybrid events and activities, with insights gathered through semi-structured interviews and two online workshops. This project took place between September 2022 and March 2023. It was overseen by the Academic Engagement team at The National Archives, with the research led by freelance researcher, Alexandra Leigh.

While we initially set out to capture experiences relating to academic engagement events, during the interviews it became apparent that remote and hybrid strategies are facilitating a much wider range of activities. As such, throughout the report 'activity' is used in the more general sense, to refer to all types of academic engagement, while 'event' is used to refer to activities with a public-facing component such as talks or seminars.

The findings of this report capture the experiences of a range of organisations, of differing sizes and with access to different resources. As such, we have not attempted to provide recommendations for 'best practice' as what may work for one organisation may be neither achievable nor applicable to another. Instead, we present key findings related to the current state of remote and hybrid academic engagement activity in the sector, as well as the reflections provided both by participants and the project team who have produced this report.

Key findings

From the interviews, four major themes relating to remote and hybrid academic engagement were identified; these were then further developed with additional information and reflections following the workshops. A brief summary of each theme is provided here:

1. **New opportunities or business as usual?** Remote and hybrid activities tend to replicate existing formats for delivery, although creative approaches are being explored on a small-scale. Organisations are paying more attention to the suitability of remote and hybrid formats for particular activities. Hybrid activities are rarely taking place and often reliant on technological capabilities.
2. **Investment of resources (time, people, technology)** Remote and hybrid activities can be as resource intensive as in-person events,

though this is not always recognised more widely within organisations. Although organisations have been able to upskill quickly since the onset of the pandemic, varied training and guidance has been provided. Further resource is essential to ensure successful delivery of more complex or varied remote and hybrid activities.

3. **Impact on attendees** Remote and hybrid activities provide greater flexibility for attendees and may support access and inclusion but are not inclusive in and of themselves. In-person activity remains important for creative approaches and connection building. Reporting measures to assess the impact of remote and hybrid activity could be more robust to ensure that audience needs are met.

4. **Creating presence among attendees** It is difficult to create a sense of presence among online attendees and they may feel excluded, particularly from hybrid events. Although collaborative tools can help to combat this, they sometimes fulfil the aims of organisers rather than attendees. To create presence, it may be necessary to set expectations for engagement within an activity or event.

Reflections

Defining 'hybrid' activity. Discussing hybrid activity can be difficult, as this can refer to different levels of audience engagement and uses of technology. It would be beneficial to develop a definition of hybrid academic engagement in the GLAMA sector as a basis for further consideration of audience needs and organisational aims.

A state of flux. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a huge shift to remote academic engagement, with lots of activity transferring online. We are now in a different state of flux as we adjust to more widespread modes of hybrid working. As such, it is difficult to assess the 'success' of remote and hybrid activity and more work is needed to establish the range of activities being undertaken and how these activities are reported on.

More data needed on audiences. Most organisations suggested that they would benefit from an improved understanding of their audiences and their experience of remote and hybrid activities. Pre-pandemic reporting measures may no longer be appropriate for the new landscape. Revised measures of reporting would likely enable organisations to do more to tailor events to their audiences.

No manifesto. Organisations are at different stages in their transition to remote and hybrid academic engagement and capacity to reflect on and expand current

offerings varies. Our participants indicated that more ground work is needed before the sector can collaborate on a 'manifesto' of recommendations for this work.

Introduction

Over the last three years, several factors – mainly the COVID-19 pandemic but also sustainability and accessibility concerns – have driven an increased demand for remote and hybrid academic engagement in cultural heritage. Despite this, there has been no extensive research into remote and hybrid academic engagement strategies within the GLAMA sector (galleries, libraries, archives, museums and academia), and there is no accepted best practice for engaging academic audiences across these spaces.

Defining academic engagement

Academic engagement in this context is the process of two-way communication between the GLAMA sector and the academic and research communities (students, academics, researchers and higher education institutions) in order to foster mutual understanding; to encourage collaboration and partnership; and to be relevant and reflective of research needs. Through academic engagement activity, organisations seek to work with the academic community as users, partners, and advocates.

Defining remote and hybrid engagement activity

Remote engagement activity includes webinars and other online events or meetings, Twitter conferences or other social media takeovers, or pre-recorded videos and other asynchronous content. Hybrid engagement activity includes events which involve attendees in person and online and which aim for an equitable experience for both audiences (rather than simply live-streaming an in-person talk or workshop for example). It must be noted that participants in this study differed when it came to their views on what constituted a hybrid event.

Summary of the study

The Academic Engagement team at The National Archives oversaw this study of practice in the GLAMA sector, with the research being led by freelance researcher Alexandra Leigh. This report draws together the findings from the two phases of the project:

- A series of semi-structured interviews with organisations and stakeholders in the GLAMA sector to explore current remote and hybrid engagement strategies and practice
- Two workshops with stakeholders from the GLAMA sector exploring barriers and opportunities in remote and hybrid engagement

This project took place between September 2022 and March 2023.

Funding
The project was funded by The National Archives' strategic research fund, an internal fund to support research at the organisation.

Secondary literature

To date there has been no systematic investigation of remote and hybrid academic engagement in the GLAMA sector. However, there have been several wider studies focusing on digital engagement in the cultural sector more generally. The most relevant to this report are:

- Culture 24's survey of hybrid working in the cultural sector.[1] A key finding was that face-to-face meetings, events and activities were still seen as necessary to build meaningful connections.
- The Centre for Cultural Value's report on the impact of Covid-19 on the cultural sector.[2] It found that digital engagement tends to attract more diverse audiences than in-person experiences.
- The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre discussion paper on the implications of the Covid-19 digital 'pivot' in museums and galleries.[3] This reported that practitioners are keen to reflect more deeply on what good digital engagement looks like and how it should connect with particular audiences.

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[1] Kate McNab, 'Summary of full hybrid working survey results', Culture 24, 2022 https://www.culture24.org.uk/over/view-of-full-hybrid-working-survey-results/
[2] Ben Walmsley et al., *Culture in crisis: impacts of Covid-19 on the UK cultural sector and where we go from here,* Centre for Cultural Value, 2022 Culture in Crisis: impacts of Covid-19 on the UK cultural sector and where we go from here - CultureHive
[3] Jenny Kidd, Eva Nieto McAvoy, Ania Ostrowska, 'Implications of the COVID-19 digital 'pivot' in museums and galleries: lessons from practitioners', Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2021 Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre | Pivot to Digital: How… (pec.ac.uk)

Method

Interviews

The first stage of the project involved recruiting participants for semi-structured interviews. We publicised an open call through The National Archives' research webpage, Twitter account, newsletter and through various JISCMail lists. We also reached out directly to contacts in the GLAMA sector involved in academic engagement.

Those who responded to our call were required to sign a participation agreement, giving consent for their information to be gathered and shared, in accordance with The National Archives' Privacy Notice.

We conducted 20 interviews with staff at 18 organisations (including colleagues at The National Archives). The participants represented a mixture of GLAMA institutions and networks. Comments from interviews and workshops have been anonymised and we will use the terms 'organisation' and 'participant' to refer to the people who took part in this study.

Two members of the project team were present in each interview, one to lead the discussion and the other to take notes, which form the basis of the following analysis. Each participant was asked a series of structured questions, which can be found in the report appendix. While participants were not necessarily asked every question, select questions from each section of the interview rubric were covered.

During analysis, the notes from each interview were reviewed inductively, looking for recurrent themes throughout the data. Themes that appeared across several interviews were noted, with further examples added to these themes as more notes were reviewed.

Workshops

The second stage of the study was comprised of online workshops that sought to further explore the themes generated through the interviews. Workshops were run in accordance with Chatham House rules.

All interview participants were invited to attend a two-hour workshop. We ran two versions of the same workshop at different times to facilitate maximum attendance. There was a total of 14 attendees at the workshops. Prior to the workshops, participants were sent a draft copy of this report that included the themes generated from the interviews. Participants were also asked to answer two questions via an online whiteboard before the workshops. These were:

- **In an ideal world…** If you had the resources and capacity, what would your ideal engagement activity look like?
- **Engagement ground truths**: What are your biggest/the most common barriers to engagement?

The workshops began with an introduction to the project and a short presentation summarising the themes surfaced in the interviews. Following this, the workshops were broken into three areas for discussion. The first, 'Ideal Worlds and Ground Truths' explored the answers that participants had submitted to the online whiteboard ahead of the workshops. Following a short break, the second session, 'Shared Values: A Manifesto for Engagement?' asked participants to discuss whether a shared manifesto for remote and hybrid engagement was desirable and what this might look like. Finally, the session concluded with a short discussion on 'Next Steps'.

Beatrice Baumgartner-Cohen, a visual note-taker, was present at each workshop to provide a visual summary of the discussion and these images can be found later in this report. These visual notes were reviewed alongside the video recordings for additional content for this report. The findings from the workshops were used to expand the existing themes in this report and inform our final reflections and conclusion.

Ten themes were initially generated from the interview and workshop data, three of which were identified as background context and removed from the main body of findings. After reviewing the remaining seven themes for similarity, we were left with the four themes which are explored in this report.

Background context
The impetus for this study was a desire to take stock and reflect on best practice following an extended period of rapid change in working methods catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Three themes emerged as important context to the study: collaborative working, pre-pandemic organisational capacity and demand for remote and hybrid activity.

Collaborative working
The organisations interviewed here delivered academic engagement in several ways. Some organisations had a centralised team responsible for academic engagement; others had a single individual leading this activity; while others had no one person or department with responsibility for academic engagement but undertook this work across varied roles and departments.

Despite this variety in organisational structure, a common theme was that much academic engagement activity is delivered through collaborative working both within and between organisations. Within organisations, academic engagement activity might be delivered as a collaboration between teams including but not limited to education, collections, and conservation. Many organisations worked with other institutions on large collaborative projects which include academic engagement, such as UKRI's [Towards a National Collection](#) research projects or doctoral programmes delivered jointly between cultural organisations and academic institutions. For many organisations, remote and hybrid work has become a central tool for facilitating the collaborative working that is necessary for academic engagement activity. It has enabled some collaborations that would not otherwise be possible, such as regular meetings of government, industry and academic stakeholders.

Pre-pandemic capacity

For most of the organisations interviewed, the COVID-19 pandemic initiated the shift to the remote – and latterly hybrid – delivery of academic engagement activity. Prior to the pandemic most organisations had not considered remote or hybrid activity, despite the benefits it offered to overcoming constraints on time, geography and accessibility. One participant noted that they had discussed the potential for running online events in 2019, but following extensive research felt that they lacked sufficient tools, capacity and training. Only one participant had been involved in academic engagement activity that included the use of a remote platform prior to the pandemic and this was in the context of a research project that focused on online engagement.

As such, the initial adoption of remote and hybrid formats in 2020 for many organisations represented a steep learning curve. Very few organisations were prepared for the delivery of online academic engagement activity and organisations were expected to switch to online delivery at very short notice. Though a few organisations had dedicated audio/visual teams who could provide some support, many staff had to take it upon themselves to learn how to use video-conferencing platforms for both internal and external events. Several organisations reported that prior to the pandemic they had no access to tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, with investment in these and other technologies driven by the pandemic. Although several organisations reported that audiences were pleased something was available and patient when it came to technical difficulties, others noted that at times there was frustration with the lack of access to materials and the low levels of staff availability in some places due to furlough.

Demand for remote and hybrid activity

The majority of participants reported that during the earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when restrictions were first introduced, there was a rush to offer academic engagement activities online. This was matched by high numbers of attendees, likely reflecting wider trends at the time as large numbers of people were compelled to stay at home and online events were seen as a novelty.

As many organisations sought ways to deliver their usual activity remotely, among those interviewed this often seems to have taken the form of like-for-like activity. There was little attempt to adapt events specifically for a remote format, at least initially: for example, a seminar that was one to two hours long was usually replicated in the same length and format, with a speaker and questions at the end.

Although many organisations reflected that their early offerings were far from perfect, most experienced a huge increase in demand during the early stages of the pandemic. While audiences were initially pleased that something was on offer despite technical limitations, the sense is that now expectations have risen as many have become more familiar with online platforms and events.

Themes

After collating and reflecting on participants' interview responses and discussions during the workshops, four major themes relating to remote and hybrid academic engagement were identified:

1. New opportunities or business as usual?
2. Investment of resources (time, people, technology)
3. Impact on attendees
4. Creating presence among attendees

1. New opportunities or business as usual?

The most commonly reported academic engagement activities were remote events, particularly those delivered in a 'broadcast mode'. By 'broadcast mode' we refer to events such as conferences and talks whereby most of the session is taken up by one or more people broadcasting information to many – though there may be the opportunity to ask questions or otherwise engage at the end of the session. A second area in which many organisations reported that a remote format could easily replicate pre-existing activity was during meetings. Most successful were small meetings where most attendees knew each other. Although in larger meetings there could be difficulties in creating presence or

understanding the rules of engagement, remote meetings still worked well where there was a relatively formal meeting structure. A few participants noted that these larger meetings tended to be aimed more towards information dissemination than discussion.

Both these types of activity are notable for having a recognisable format, which largely dictates that one person speak at a time. This is modelled on existing in-person formats and fits with the capabilities of the most widely available online platforms, meaning that attendees can engage with the content without fear of interrupting someone or otherwise disrupting the event. Similarly, in large meetings with a more formalised structure it is possible to contribute within the accepted norms of the format. Conversely, a more relaxed format can be adopted in smaller, informal meetings, whereby attendees may feel more comfortable contributing their ideas.

Hybrid solutions remained largely uncommon, having only been trialled in a few instances in large-scale conferences and smaller, informal meetings, such as internal reading groups. Their successful adoption for the latter may be because audiences were smaller and more likely to be patient with technical issues. In both examples, technology played a part in their success: some participants noted the use of 360° cameras in meetings or specialised event delivery platforms such as Pheedloop. Among some participants there was a reluctance to deliver hybrid activity and they expressed uncertainty as to whether this was what audiences truly wanted. Hybrid engagement appears to require a higher level of investment across areas such as technology, skills, and staff time. Without a guarantee that this is what audiences want and that it is possible to deliver at a level that can satisfy audiences expectations and needs, it seems organisations may be slower to develop academic engagement activities in a hybrid mode. Despite this, several participants noted that they expected large academic conferences to be one area that remained hybrid in future.

While replicating existing academic engagement activities in a remote format was most often reported, in a few instances participants noted examples of using remote or hybrid technologies to deliver more creative solutions. Examples included sending lab kits to participants to follow an online class teaching new conservation methods at home; or devising an educational session using a creative combination of low-technology solutions (i.e. video-calling platform) and materials that participants might reasonably have on hand, such as pen and paper. Several participants reported the benefits of using technology to enhance both remote and in-person delivery. Using digital technologies such as virtual reading rooms or visualisers ensured that whether attending in-person

or online, all would have an equitable view of the demonstration. It was strongly felt that different modes of delivery supported different types of activity, with a preference towards in-person events where more creative outputs were required.

Participants also noted that demand for remote and hybrid engagement activity is likely to change further still, as organisations and individuals adjust to a new environment where hybrid working is more widespread. Many organisations are already thinking more carefully about ways to tailor online formats both to the activity itself and the needs of the audience. For example, several participants reported making events shorter with the aim of holding on to audience attention. It should be noted that this was not always the case: one participant mentioned having to make online events longer to accommodate informal conversations that would have happened before and after equivalent in-person events.
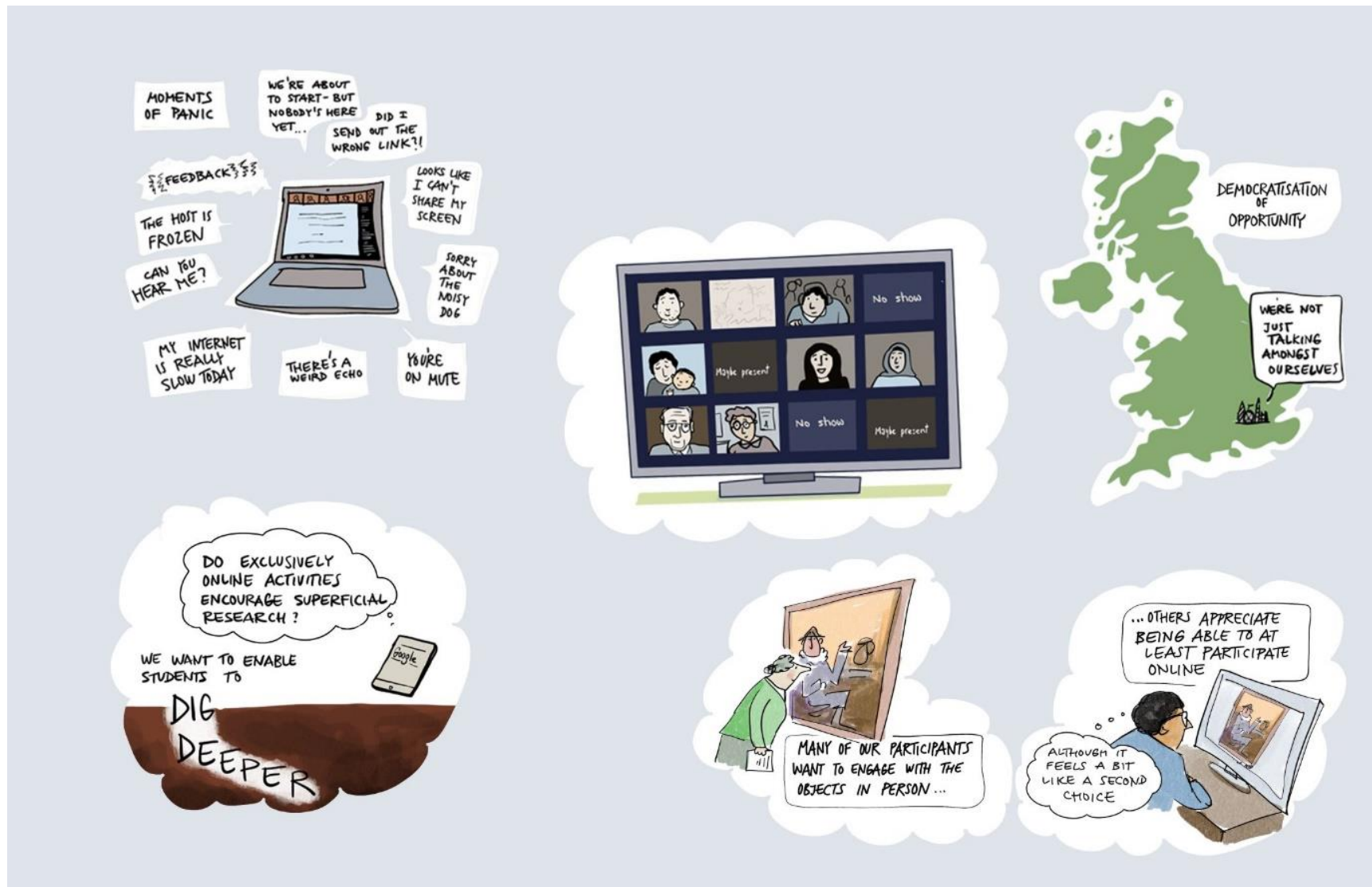
Visual notes prompted by the project workshops. © Beatrice Baumgartner-Cohen.

Collection of six images of the following:

Image 1: Laptop with comments from event attendees.

Image 2: Computer screen showing attendees of online event, some of whom have their camera turned off.

Image 3: Democratisation of opportunity. Image of the UK, with comment highlighting London.

Image 4: Tunnel going underground to represent in-depth research. Question: do exclusively online activities encourage superficial research?

Image 5: Person looking at a portrait in a gallery.

Image 6: Person looking at a digital version of the same portrait.

Key findings
- 'Broadcast mode' events and formal meetings have been the most common forms of online academic engagement to date
- More creative engagement activities are being explored on a small-scale
- Hybrid events are rarely taking place and there is uncertainty as to whether they are desired by audiences
- Situation reflects the capabilities of the most widely available technologies and the pressure to adapt to new modes of working due to the pandemic
- Formats of remote and hybrid engagement are likely to continue to shift as we adjust to new working practices

## *2. Investment of resources (time, people, technology)*

Remote and hybrid activities, particularly events, can often take far more resources than is sometimes assumed within the wider organisation. This was most often expressed by participants in terms of staff time, though investment in skills and technology were also frequently noted. Although several participants stated that lead times could be shorter for remote or hybrid events compared to those in in-person, the time taken to plan these was similar overall. While a fully remote event could feasibly be facilitated by one individual, it was often noted that to run a successful remote or hybrid event required at least two people to manage multiple information streams. Hybrid events may require extra staff to respond to any issues that arise, both on site and online. While at an in-person event the organiser has an overview of what attendees and speakers do and can respond immediately, in a remote or hybrid situation this may be more challenging.

Another reason for increased pressures on staff time when running remote or hybrid events was the additional tasks before and after the event itself. For example, while most participants felt that their audiences were now largely comfortable with popular platforms such as Zoom, more specialised tools still required detailed guidance to minimise queries. Likewise, if the organisation had decided to make a recording available to attendees following the event, this might involve additional work, such as processing of videos, captioning, and transcripts. Time and capacity were also a barrier to catering to different audience segments. Some participants felt like they could either choose to deliver an event targeted to a particular group or run a larger, broadcast-style event that did not meet everyone's needs. Several participants pointed out the lack of staff training in remote and hybrid forms of engagement. While most participants agreed that their teams were now happy with the basics of

videoconferencing, several reported that in the early stages of the pandemic they had had to effectively teach themselves how to use various technologies for organising remote academic engagement activities. This was often with little institutional support. In some instances, where participants provided services-only contracts to organisations, participants had to learn these tools in their own time and so were effectively unpaid. A few organisations mentioned that they did have support from in-house audio/visual or public events teams when it came to delivering remote or hybrid events.

In addition to the increased workload mentioned by several participants, unfamiliarity with technology could lead to additional stress for those delivering academic engagement activity. Several participants reported feeling as though they were 'winging it'; although they might be comfortable using a platform as an attendee, the multiple demands on their attention as a host made some feel overwhelmed. Attendees could be critical when the activity did not run smoothly, adding to the pressures felt by those hosting the session.

Another area where resources played a significant role in what participants could offer in terms of remote and hybrid academic engagement activities was technological support. For hybrid activity, it appeared that there was a significant upfront investment required to ensure their smooth running. Those that ran hybrid activities often mentioned specialised audio/visual equipment, such as 360° cameras that would track who was speaking in the room. This may be one factor that explains the comparative lack of uptake of hybrid activity as opposed to remote and the proliferation of a simpler 'broadcast' style event.
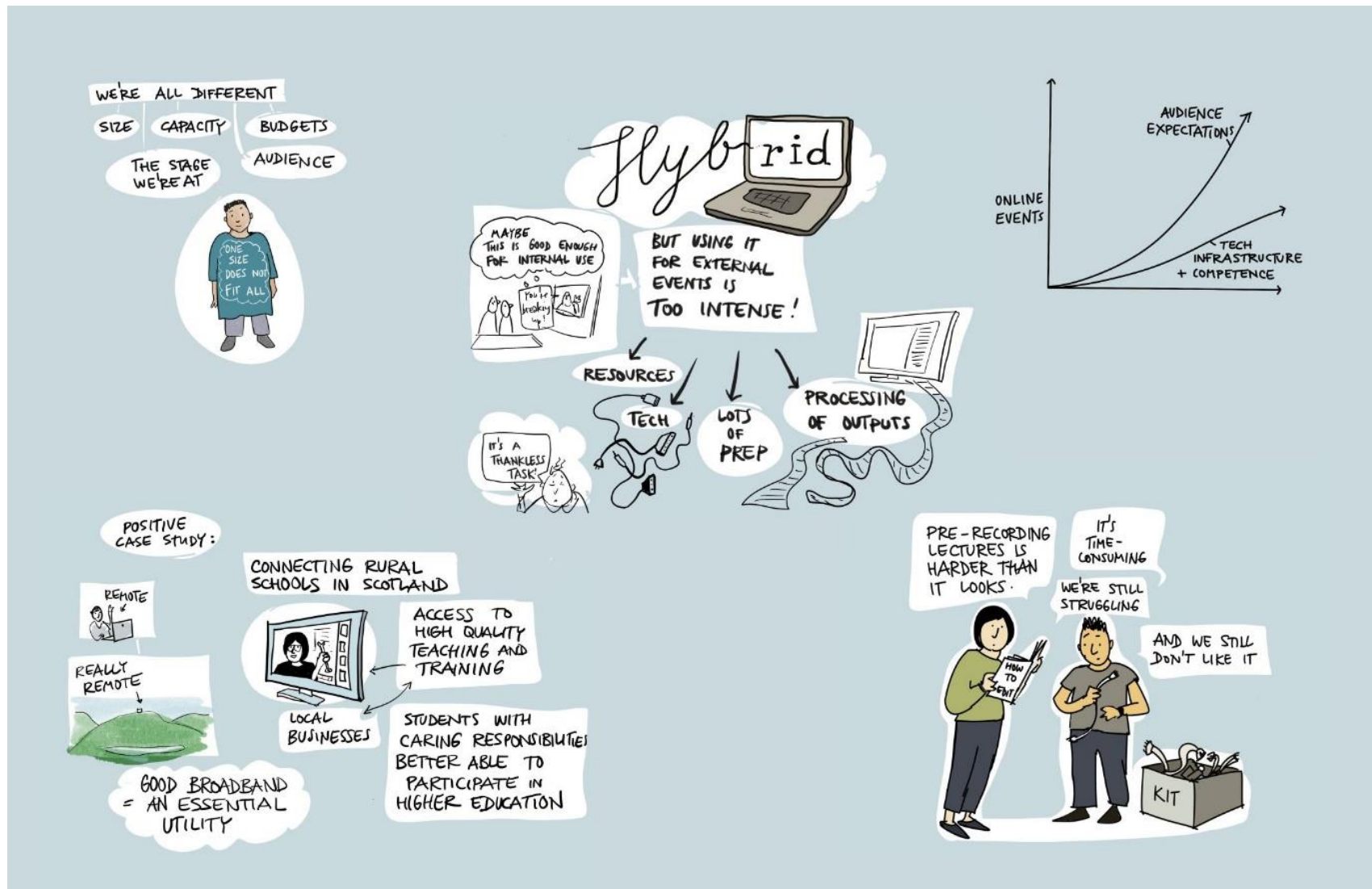
Visual notes prompted by the project workshops. © Beatrice Baumgartner-Cohen.

Collection of five images of the following:

Image 1: Person in a baggy t-shirt, stating that one size does not fit all.

Image 2: Laptop with comments on the difficulties of delivering hybrid events.

Image 3: Line graph showing that audience expectations are exceeding technical infrastructure and competence in the sector

Image 4: Positive case study on connecting rural schools in Scotland. Computer screen with comments on the benefits of remote delivery.

Image 5: Two people struggling to set up lecture recording equipment.

Key findings:
- Remote and hybrid events can be as resource intensive as in-person events
- Remote and hybrid events usually require significant preparation, multiple facilitators and time spent processing event outputs
- Organisations upskilled quickly with limited resources after the onset of the pandemic but are under pressure as audience expectations rise
- Lack of technological investment is a barrier to offering more complex activities, including hybrid delivery

3. Impact on attendees

Remote and hybrid activity is increasingly seen as a means to overcome physical, geographical and temporal barriers, providing greater flexibility for participants and organisers. The majority of participants reported that they felt that remote and hybrid academic engagement activities were valued by their audiences. While most organisations agreed that offering remote and hybrid activities went some way towards improving accessibility and inclusivity, they were keen to stress that this was often a by-product of general benefits that the shift towards remote work offered.

Conversely, many participants also reflected that simply offering academic engagement activities in a remote or hybrid format did not make these accessible. Several participants saw inclusivity and accessibility as an active decision: what includes some might inevitably exclude others. For example, while online activity might overcome geographic barriers it could also exclude those without access to reliable internet coverage or a digital device. As such, many participants were aware that their offering needed to be driven by careful thinking around who the intended audience was. Participants were keen that online activity did not become the default means of engagement but was consciously adopted where appropriate. This was often linked to broader work that organisations were doing around improving inclusion and accessibility for their audiences.

While most organisations reported that they would like to tailor their events to their audiences, very few had the capacity and means to fully report on academic engagement. None had measures currently in place for reporting specifically on remote or hybrid activities. Where feedback mechanisms were available they were often stronger in one area than another: for example, several organisations had mature feedback loops in place for students while

there might be a lack of feedback from internal (staff) audiences or wider academic audiences. A few organisations reported co-designed initiatives with targeted sections of their audiences: again, this was most often with students. These approaches were usually for ad hoc, project-based work rather than as a part of wider planning.

To facilitate a more audience-led approach to academic engagement activity would require improved reporting measures. Discussions indicated the potential to involve audiences in the design of activities from the outset, as well as the need for improved post-event feedback gathering. In particular, participants suggested it may be useful to collect feedback from non-attendees due to the high drop-out rate for online events. It was suggested that following the pandemic, audience preferences were still shifting and there was a need to understand what successful engagement activity looked like in the current context. Most participants commented on a decline in attendance at remote academic events since the start of the pandemic. Several explanations were offered for this by participants, including the return to normal working patterns as many of the restrictions surrounding the pandemic were lifted, as well as event fatigue among attendees. Yet few participants were concerned by this shift: many reflected on a change in their own perspective and valued how well-received events were, rather than attendee numbers.

Despite the decline in numbers of attendees, most participants reported a continued demand for remote activity. A few participants commented on the link between in-person and remote and hybrid events, with some attributing the continued interest in online events due to the availability of in-person ones. Likewise, one participant who had been involved in developing hybrid facilities for universities noted that where activities were offered in a hybrid format, an enhanced online experience actively encouraged students to attend in-person.
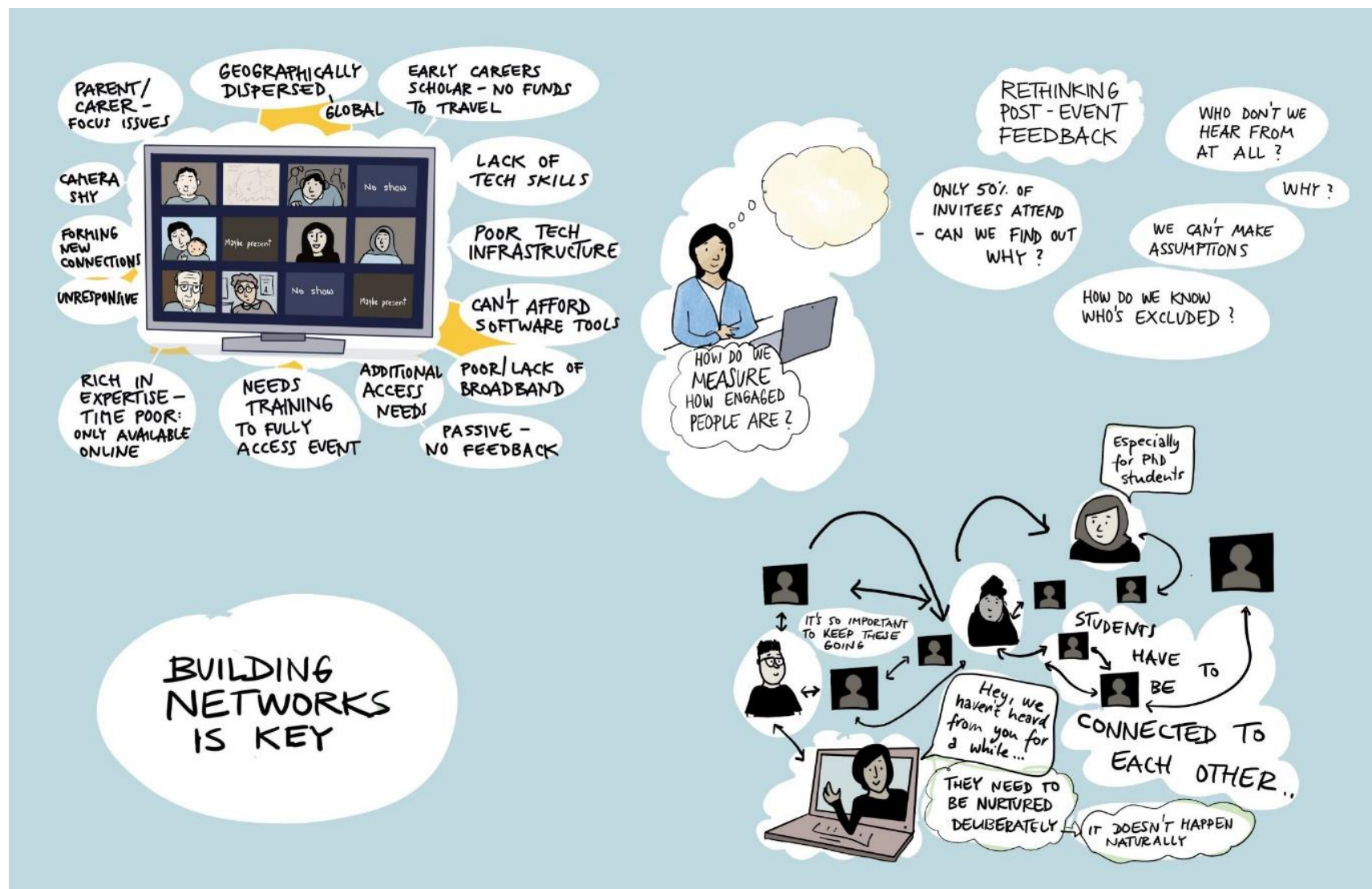
Visual notes prompted by the project workshops. © Beatrice Baumgartner-Cohen.

Collection of four images of the following:

Image 1: Computer screen with comments relating to barriers to online engagement.

Image 2: Person at a laptop, thinking about measuring engagement.

Image 3: Text stating that 'building networks is key'.

Image 4: Connections between students.

Key findings:
- Remote and hybrid activity provides greater flexibility for attendees
- Online activity is not inclusive in itself; considerations around diversity, equity and inclusion must be factored into planning and delivery
- Attendance at online events has declined since the start of the pandemic but organisations are still managing to reach audiences
- Reporting mechanisms for measuring the impact of online academic engagement activity could be more robust

4. Creating presence

Many participants reported that a particularly difficult area to address through either remote or hybrid academic engagement strategies was creating a sense of presence among online attendees. This was most commonly linked to difficulties in retaining focus, as well as the feeling that important conversations were being had elsewhere.

When reflecting on their experiences as attendees of academic engagement activities, several participants commented on the challenge of staying engaged in the session. Some mentioned that it was far too easy to be distracted by other activities, such as checking emails or opening another piece of work on a second screen. Issues with disrupted connections and the length of sessions were additional obstacles mentioned. Participants also felt it could be difficult to invite someone to join a discussion online. This was particularly the case where individuals kept their cameras off, as individuals were aware there might be many reasons why someone did not wish to turn their camera on. For some participants, this was accompanied by a concern in the depth of engagement in online formats. Those involved in teaching noted they had seen a decline in student engagement among cohorts affected by the pandemic. This may be related to the possibility of a more passive style of interaction in remote and hybrid activity.

When it comes to hybrid events, a particular difficulty for online attendees was to feel valued or that their participation was equivalent to that of those attendees in the room. This varied from missing out on informal discussions and networking between sessions to the sense that all the important decisions were being made over coffee or dinner. Similarly, with teaching in particular, online attendance may be facilitated asynchronously through recorded materials which naturally deprives those online from engaging in the same way as those in the room. Some participants reported success using online tools to improve engagement when hosting remote events. Polls, chats, and online

whiteboards were all common strategies among participants to improve attention and encourage participation during remote academic engagement activities. One participant noted that virtual whiteboards could be particularly useful where internet connection was disrupted as it enabled participants to remain engaged in the session through asynchronous activity while they were disconnected. While some organisations had implemented successful strategies to create presence during hybrid meetings and events, this often required a high level of existing investment in audio-visual resources.

Nonetheless, a few participants also noted that these tools may be more beneficial for hosts to measure feedback during the session and to ensure continued engagement with the material. Tools for engagement such as polls, questions, and whiteboards – while helpful – ran the risk of creating overload for attendees when used ineffectively. Several participants also suggested that intensive facilitation was necessary to encourage participation in remote and hybrid events. This could mean encouraging people to keep their cameras on or expressing a wish for people to stay for the whole session, while remaining sensitive to individual circumstances that may prevent people from doing so.

Most participants felt strongly that some types of academic engagement activity simply did not work online. These were often events with a more fluid agenda or activities that required either some degree of creativity or generation of ideas. In a remote format, one speaker inevitably has to address the whole group, so it may be that attendees are less comfortable sharing ideas in such a setting. Although a lack of set rules for creative online engagement appears to dissuade many, one participant reflected that this might be beneficial in certain areas, such as seminar-style teaching. Likewise, networking or relationship building was something that participants often mentioned did not work well online. Some participants noted these types of activity could work in small groups or when individuals knew each other well; yet common approaches to facilitating connection such as ice-breakers or breakout rooms were generally disliked by participants.

Despite this, most participants reflected that there was a continued place for online activities alongside in-person sessions. Many felt it was a case of choosing the right tool for the right event: in many instances, this fitted into the organisation's wider consideration of the types of academic engagement activities they offered and what was the most appropriate format to achieve their intended outcomes going forward.
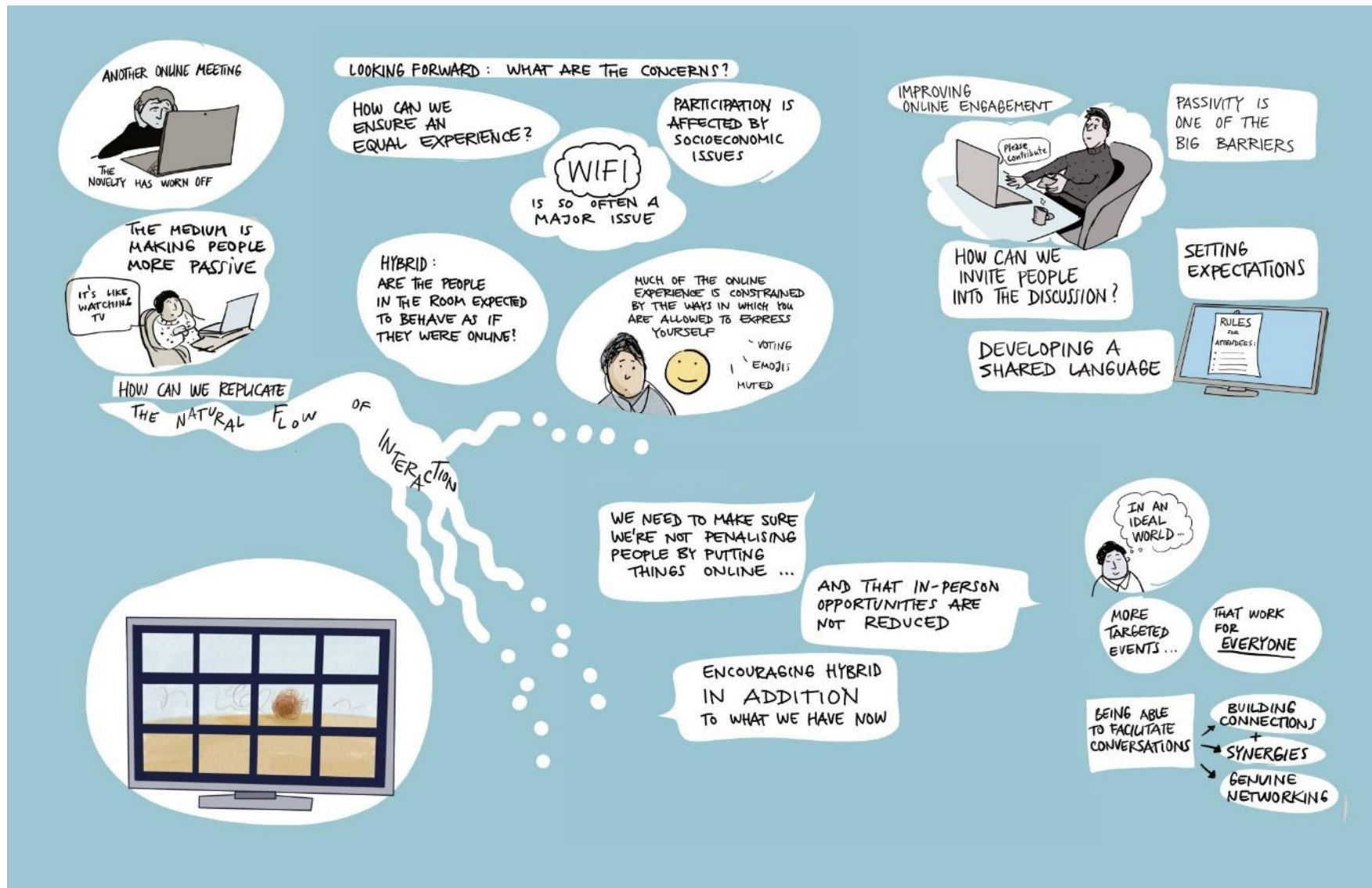
Visual notes prompted by the project workshops. © Beatrice Baumgartner-Cohen.

Collection of six images of the following:

Image 1: Concerns regarding remote and hybrid engagement.

Image 2: Person at computer with comments on strategies for maximising engagement.

Image 3: Computer screen showing image of tumbleweed.

Image 4: Person imagining ideal scenarios for remote and hybrid engagement.

Key findings:
- Difficult to create a sense of presence and focus in online activities
- Online participants can feel excluded when taking part in hybrid events
- Collaborative tools can help to engage attendees and provide event feedback
- Both online and in-person events will remain important going forward

Reflections

The responses gathered across the interviews and workshops gave us a solid understanding of current practice in the sector but they also shed light on a number of fruitful areas for further research.

Defining 'hybrid' activity

The workshops highlighted difficulties in discussing hybrid events as this can accommodate differing levels of engagement for online and in-person audiences. It would be beneficial to develop a sector definition of hybrid, as well as differing layers of engagement in between, so that audiences can have an improved understanding of what engagement is being offered when choosing how to participate in an event. For example, it may be more appropriate to describe an event as having 'online access' whether to a live stream or a recording at a later date, if an event has not been set up to provide equitable experience both in person and online.

A state of flux

This study has highlighted that the sector is still in a state of flux when it comes to offering remote and hybrid academic engagement activity. For example, while several participants noted that they originally considered success in terms of metrics, they were now focused more on whether the activity had met audiences needs and expectations. Likewise, some participants reflected that even their audiences were shifting as they drew in new people through online activities and events. Continued reflection and further training for staff is essential to ensure that more sophisticated and responsive remote and hybrid activities continue to develop.

More data needed on audiences

It appeared that most participants would benefit from a better understanding of their audiences. This can be related to the change in audiences and the new mode of engagement presented by remote and hybrid activity discussed above. Enhanced or different reporting measures could help organisations better tailor

events to academic audiences, creating sophisticated feedback loops that allow for iterative development of events. Existing reporting measures for students tended to be the most well-developed and could be used as a template for other key audiences. Improved reporting measures – including from non-attendees – could support the development of academic engagement activities that meet the needs of the identified audience.

No manifesto

Recognising that we are still in a period of transition, participants felt that the sector is not yet ready for a 'manifesto' of recommendations for the delivery of remote and hybrid academic engagement activity. This study suggests that our most urgent work should be targeted towards building understanding of and prioritising the experience of our academic audiences in the activities we deliver. Future research and knowledge sharing could focus on areas including:

- Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion in remote and hybrid activities
- Setting expectations for institutional facilitation and audience engagement during remote and hybrid activity
- Best practice for hybrid activities, recognising different institutional resources and inevitable technological shifts

Visual notes prompted by the project workshops. © Beatrice Baumgartner-Cohen.

Collection of six images of the following:

Image 1: Copy of joint manifesto, with the shared values of inclusivity, accessibility and academic rigour.

Image 2: Person considering whether to take an audience-first or outcome-first approach.

Image 3: Person using sign language, with comments on accessibility needs.

Image 4: Text stating 'focus on inclusivity and accessibility within the parameters of online events'.

Image 5: Image of two people, one with a preference for engaging in person and one with a preference for engaging online.

Image 6: Text stating 'whatever the format enabling participants to feel enriched by the experience'.

Contact

This was a small, time-limited study and we recognise that our results represent only a sample of the GLAMA sector. We hope that our findings will be a foundation for further work in this space.

If you have comments or questions about this report, please contact research@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all our participants from the GLAMA sector who responded to our call and took part in the interviews and workshops.

References

Kidd, Jenny, Nieto McAvoy, Eva and Ostrowska, Ania 'Implications of the COVID-19 digital 'pivot' in museums and galleries: lessons from practitioners', Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2021 Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre | Pivot to Digital: How… (pec.ac.uk)

McNab, Kate, 'Summary of full hybrid working survey results', Culture 24, 2022 https://www.culture24.org.uk/over/view-of-full-hybrid-working-survey-results/

Walmsley, Ben, et al., *Culture in crisis: impacts of Covid-19 on the UK cultural sector and where we go from here,* Centre for Cultural Value, 2022 Culture in Crisis: impacts of Covid-19 on the UK cultural sector and where we go from here - CultureHive

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participation agreement

THIS AGREEMENT dated _____ is made

BETWEEN:

(1) THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES (hereafter TNA), whose registered office is at Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU ; and

(2) insert contributing organisation here

(individually a **"Party"** and collectively the **"Parties"**)

This agreement relates to your participation in a study led by **ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM** at **TNA** to better understand remote and hybrid academic engagement activities across the GLAMA sector.

Section A: The Project

- **"The Project"** shall be the programme of work entitled 'Build it and they probably won't come: exploring remote and hybrid engagement strategies in the GLAMA sector' which is undertaken by **TNA**.

- The term of the Project shall run from 1 September 2022 to 31 March 2023.

- Research activity shall be conducted both remotely, via MS Teams or Zoom, and in-person at TNA under the supervision of the Academic Engagement Team.

Section B: Data collection, usage and participation

- Research will be conducted, and data will be collected, in accordance with [The National Archives' Privacy Notice](#).

- TNA agrees to comply with and run subsequent Research Workshops in accordance with [Chatham House rules.](#) When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

Section C: Participation Agreement

You should only agree to participate in the study if you agree with all of the statements below and accept that participating will involve the listed activities.

- I have read and understood Section A

- I have read, understood and been given access to TNA's Privacy Notice which sets out how we collect and use personal information: [The National Archives - Privacy Notice](#)

- I have had an opportunity to ask questions.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason and I am free to decline to answer any particular question(s).

- I understand that taking part in the research will include the following activity/activities as part of the research:

  - Being interviewed

  - Participating in a research-workshop

- I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review my answers within a time frame given to me by TNA.

- I give consent for information shared to be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs without using my name or information that may identify my institution, in accordance with TNA's Privacy Notice and Chatham House rules.

- I confirm my agreement to take part in the project on the basis set out above

Signed:_____

Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview questions

Organisation background
- Type of organisation (main activity)
- Number of staff (ranges)

Gallery
Library
Archive
Museum
Academia
Education

1-9 staff
10-19 staff
20-49 staff
50 – 249 staff
250+ staff

Personnel
- Who is responsible for academic engagement (AE) activity in your organisation?
- Is this centralised (led by one team working across the organisation), or spread across different teams?

Strategy and planning
- What kinds of activity does your organisation view as AE? Is your AE events-focused or are you engaging in different ways, such as newsletters, social media etc.?
- Is there an overall AE strategy and/or programme for your organisation? If so, how does remote/hybrid engagement feature?
- How is your AE engagement activity planned and delivered? Is your activity led by specific objectives or desired impacts?
- Take us through your planning process for AE engagement activity from start to finish.

Remote and hybrid activities
- Do you use remote/hybrid AE engagement activities? Why? Why not?

- What kinds of remote/hybrid AE engagement activities do you deliver?
- What dictates whether AE activity is remote/hybrid or in person?
- When it comes to remote/hybrid AE activity what has worked/not worked?
- What is the appetite for in-person vs remote vs hybrid from your organisation and team?
- What online tools have you found useful/not useful for remote and hybrid AE engagement (other than Zoom/Teams?)
- What benefits and challenges have you found when delivering remote and hybrid AE activity?
- What consideration has been given when making remote/hybrid events inclusive or accessible?

Audience response

- How good an understanding do you have of your audience and their needs? Is programming large scale (aimed at the whole audience) or more targeted (aimed at smaller sections of that audience)?
- How do you measure the success of remote and hybrid AE engagement activity?
- What have responses been like to remote/hybrid activity from your audiences?
- Is there any data or anecdotal evidence you can share around event registration vs event attendance (exploring attrition rates)? Is there anything you do to try and improve attrition rates? E.g. when do you send links for online events? Do you send regular reminders? What do these look like? What are lead times like for advertising remote or hybrid activity?
- Do you have any feedback from audiences around how they are engaging with remote material/activities? For example, if attending an online conference do they book out the week or are they coxing and boxing work and sessions? Are there other factors that influence their attendance and engagement, such as time of year?

Diversity, equity and inclusion

- What is your approach to accessibility and inclusivity in AE activity? What has worked/not worked?
- Does your organisation see remote/hybrid activity as a means of improving inclusion and/or accessibility?

Resourcing

- What challenges do you have around resourcing the delivery of remote and hybrid engagement activity? How far do any issues around staffing, budgets etc. affect your AE engagement strategies?

Pandemic

- Has your approach to remote and hybrid AE engagement activity changed since the lessening of Covid restrictions? If so, how and what has been the impact of this?

Closing

- Thank participants for their time
- Ask if they have any questions or if there's anything that we haven't covered that they would like to mention
- Remind them that we will send them notes on their answers to review and that we will keep in touch about the next stage of the project