To Zoom and beyond! Insights from AAC users who conducted training for students and professionals via video conferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The Straight Talking Group is an expert user group of individuals using AAC. For many years, the group has met fortnightly at The University of Dundee, working with researchers to evaluate and develop AAC technology. They also support teaching activities in the School of Science and Engineering and the wider university. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, the group could no longer meet in person and, with the support of university staff to overcome some initial barriers, took steps to meet via the online video conferencing software, Zoom.

Meeting online has not only allowed group members to stay in touch from a social perspective and enabled members to join from further afield, but it has allowed the group to continue their important contributions into teaching across the university. This included Q & A sessions with student doctors, sharing experiences and best practice of how to support and interact with patients who use AAC. Group members rotated between student breakout rooms to enable more in-depth and efficient discussions with individuals and the sessions were very well received. As the group became more comfortable and confident with online teaching experiences, further opportunities presented and the group conducted a session with teachers from a local specialist school, feeding back vital insights about their experiences from their school days.

Within this presentation, members of the Straight Talking Group will share their experiences of overcoming barriers to access online video conferencing technologies and the impact of using this software during the pandemic. They will also discuss their experiences of lockdown in addition to reflecting on their remote teaching experiences. Finally, the group will provide hints and tips for communicating effectively online with someone who uses AAC.