

Organising and hosting scientific webinars for the IAT London branch

ROBIN LABESSE

FHMS, Senate House, University of Surrey, Guildford GU2 7XH UK

Correspondence: r.labesse@surrey.ac.uk

Abstract

The Levels 4 – 6 Higher Education Diplomas in Laboratory Animal Science and Technology (LAS&T) build towards a degree level qualification. Each unit will equip students with valuable skills for the workplace and develop their research and writing skills in order to prepare them for levels 5 – 6.

This paper discusses the provision of Continuing Professional Development for Animal Technologists by the use of webinars on the use of the less common laboratory species.

Keywords: Continuing Professional Development, Webinar, Animal Technologist

Introduction

The Institute of Animal Technology (IAT) was founded in 1950 and has the purpose ‘to advance knowledge and promote excellence in the care and welfare of animals in science and to enhance the standard and status of those professionally engaged in the care, welfare and use of animals in science’.¹ The IAT is governed by a national Council which relies on local branches for part of its aims. The London branch of the IAT embraces the general goals and in 2019 organised its first Species Month event. The event gave the opportunity to IAT Animal Technicians to visit facilities in London. This event was successful and received positive feedback. Therefore it was decided to organise it again in 2020. When the global pandemic started, it was rapidly decided to move away from visits because of the uncertainty around their feasibility. The event took place online as webinars to deliver the closest results to the original design. To create a full month of events, the webinars were spread as equally as possible throughout the month.

I was the project lead for the webinars and author of this report. I was responsible for identifying and liaising with the speakers, including the coordination of time and dates. I hosted the events and was available for the rehearsal session with the speakers and the software platform coordinator. I created the marketing material with assistance from other committee members of the IAT London branch and took an active role in promoting the event via social media. I also coordinated the event promotion via the IAT Bulletin. The registration of the attendees, the communication with them and a brief security screening were performed by myself.

Assignment 1

Aim

Species Month was created to educate Animal Technicians and create a basis for information exchange. In the past, many units were multi-species and technicians were exposed to a variety of animals. With the professionalisation of Animal Technology, many technicians are now highly specialised and have worked with fewer species or, so it was perceived by the members of the London branch committee. This event was created to remedy this situation. In addition, it was believed that it would be a platform of exchange and encourage translational thinking. It was also hoped that the event may be beneficial for technicians new to working with any of the species that were presented. The decision to move from a physical to a virtual platform allowed to pursue the same aims in a different manner.

Objective:

This project aimed to deliver different goals. First and foremost, it had the goal to offer a varied programme covering different species:

1. Exposure to those species less commonly found in animal research in the United Kingdom (UK). The presentations were informative and an hour long.
2. To give the opportunity to participants to claim 1 Continuous Professional Development point (CPD). CPD is a tool used to ensure that professionals stay up to date with current good practice and certain levels of memberships require a yearly minimum of CPD points to remain on a register. (e.g. Register of Animal Technologists – RAnTech). As a rule of thumb, one hour of training equates to one or two hours CPD depending on the CPD activity. To ensure this, the speakers were informed of the format and given guidelines of the topics to cover. On average the London branch events usually attract 20 to 30 attendees. For this event to be considered a success, a minimum number of participants on the day will be required.
3. One benefit of moving to an online format was the ability to make the presentations available to a wider audience than it would be possible to accommodate otherwise. This project also aimed to have some proportion of attendees from outside the London branch and the London area.
4. The event would need to take place over the course of 30 days or a month.
5. The objectives were designed to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART). This tool is used in project planning to avoid vague measures for success. A non-SMART objective could be: we will present about a variety of species. The SMART version of that objective would be:
 - a) The presentation would need to cover a minimum of 6 to 8 different species with none being about mice or rats to fit our criteria. As much variety as possible was sought. This objective was for example, better achieved if all species presented were not land mammals. With the availability to reach presenters from the UK and potentially abroad this was considered both achievable and realistic. To meet full scope of this project in a timely manner, as per the timeframe (expanded on further along in this report), this objective will need to be met at the very least 1 month before the presentations by form of a firm commitment from the presenters.

An hour slot will be allocated for each presentation. The presenter will be asked to prepare a 45-50 minute presentation covering a specific list of topics described in the standard template copied above.

If the presentation is a little shorter or longer, the hour criteria was to be achieved by adjusting the numbers of questions taken by the host. The 5 minutes introduction of the event and the host, which is done before the actual presentation, can also be shortened. This criterion will be assessed for its success at the end of the series. We were looking for a maximum standard deviation of 5 minutes from the 60 minutes target.

Dear Speaker,

Thank you for agreeing in principle to participate to our Species Month event by giving a presentation about “insert species”,

Please see a summary of what we are looking for:

A 45-50 minute presentation, including (this is not a strict format):

- Information about the species (origin, strains, any relevant metabolic data).
- Environmental conditions required.
- Housing (local example and pictures)
- Behaviour/Social.
- Type of research they are used for.
- Personal experience.
- 3Rs considerations.
- Anything else you think might be relevant.

5-10 minutes for questions.

Many thanks

- b) For this event to be a success, an average participation of 20+ attendees was our objective. The software used to virtually host the presentation allowed us to keep track of this. Potentially, depending on the software used for hosting and for registration, other metrics could be achieved. We could for example monitor people leaving before the end of the event or cancelling their registration to a following presentation after attending one. We could measure attendees signing up for another presentation after attending one. Conversion rate from registration to attendance, or even from visiting the event page to registering would be an interesting measure of success. However as this was our first event, and the capacity to collect such metric had not been fully established yet, we mainly focussed on attendees' numbers.
- c) During the first year of this event, which only offered physical visits of facilities, we only had 1 attendee that was not physically based in London. However, this attendee was a member of the London branch and travelled to London for work regularly. As a measure of success, 5 attendees across the whole event, or an average of just under 1 attendee per presentation, from another branch of the IAT or outside the UK would be considered a success for this first event.
- d) To ensure the event remained within the theme of a species ‘month’ a maximum period of 31 days took place from the first to the last presentation. It was required to cover at least 21 days to ensure it was not just a species week or weeks.

Organisational Context

Stakeholders (commitments and level of influence)

The stakeholders of this project were the IAT London branch committee, the IAT, the members of the London branch, other potential attendees and the employers of organiser and the attendees.

The IAT London branch had an obligation under their charter with the IAT to run a minimum of one educational event per year. With the pandemic, the options were limited and this event was likely to be the only occasion for the branch committee to fulfil their commitment. Therefore, the interest of the committee is high. I am the chair of the committee and therefore have a strong level of influence on the committee's view. However, the committee is run collegiately and no major change was decided without a discussion between a quorum of committee members. This was agreed when we decided to move the event online on the suggestion of a committee member.

The IAT is highly committed to delivering its mission and has an interest in events taking place. However, traditionally, the IAT provides branches a certain level of independence and expects the committees to work within the agreed charter. Because branch work is under the IAT's umbrella, the level of influence of the IAT is high. The interest of the IAT with the development of this project was likely to be low. Potentially this would be higher when the promotion of the event commenced as the branch relied on the 'IAT' network and reach for promotion. It was therefore important to involve the IAT in the process.

Our scoping research suggested this event would fill a void in CPD on offer at the time. Therefore attendees were hoped to have a strong interest in the presentations. They did not have any direct influence on the creation of this event but their requirements should be kept in mind to fulfil objectives c) and d). They will also indirectly have a strong influence on the event design in following years, should the event be successful enough to be repeated.

My employers and those of the contributors, had an indirect interest. While it was possible that employers may have recognised the benefit in participating (e.g. fulfilling openness commitment under the Concordat on Openness and increase institution visibility/image), they also recognised this project required time from the employee. In this case the employer, did not have an influence on the project directly but had an influence on the time resource available to all those involved. This was limited as many of the contributors had some control over their workday and were doing a vast portion of the work during their personal time. However institutions and employers had the power to prevent a speaker from participating. They therefore had an

enormous influence on the part of the project consisting of securing speakers and their influence would be lower after that. It should however not be trivialised as they could change their minds at the last minute.

The various interest and influence can be visualised below on Figure 1:

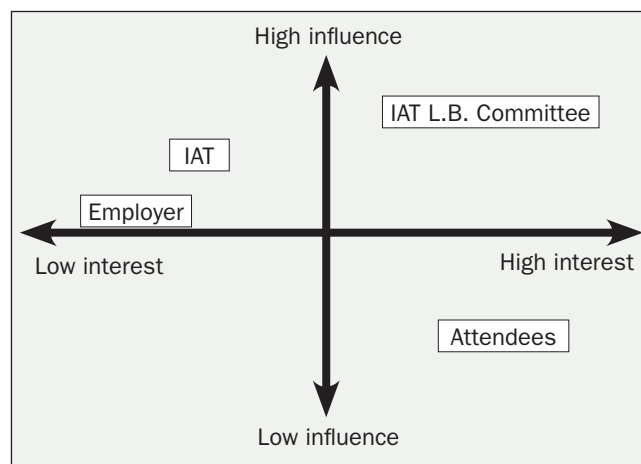


Figure 1. Interests and Influences.

As for any project, this one relied on the participation and the goodwill of a multitude of factors, from direct participants to removed stakeholders. Without full commitment and clear understanding, the final product may not have been delivered. Any disagreement could either delay or completely jeopardise this project. As project lead, I was fully committed to prevent this by offering a clear view of the project at all times based on the level of interest and influence of each factor of this project. This will be further developed in the planning part of this document.

Risk analysis (including SWOT analysis and risk register)

I started this risk analysis by using a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. These are traditionally more of a business tool to help stakeholders decide on the viability of a new venture. These were a common part of business cases and used here as a chance to provide an overview of the context of the project. In the case of a business proposal, to simplify, if the Weaknesses and Threats are more important than the Strengths and Opportunities, a project will not go ahead.

Strengths: Moving to a virtual platform allowed more resilience to the evolving global situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowed more flexibility by the organisation, thus removing threats such as the risk of interfering with the biological barrier. It simplified the organisational logistics by eliminating travel time as well.

Due to concerns regarding Animal Welfare, the 2019 event only allowed for small groups to visit. This was, for example, to prevent excessive noise in a working facility. The webinars were accessible to more people.

Weaknesses: This event was highly dependent on people giving their time. While moving online removed some uncertainty arising from the pandemic, a changing world might make people less likely to commit in advance. As often, the speaker and organiser would be creating, promoting and conducting this event on their own time.

For the event to be successful, an effective advertising campaign needed to be created. With different working patterns and people working from home, some physical means of marketing were not relevant or available.

Opportunities: The webinars were not only accessible to more people but others were able to participate from outside the London area. Reaching a wider audience could increase participation. Therefore, it could promote knowledge further and faster than by hosting visits. We could welcome attendees from across the UK, instead of the local area and possibly, also international attendees.

This format offered access to a bigger pool of speakers by allowing the organiser to reach outside London and eliminate travel restrictions and costs.

Threat: The event was highly dependent on software technology and reliable internet connections for both the speakers and the presenter. This was tested before each webinar. Contingency plans were required for poor connection (e.g. hotspot available as a backup).

While the Concordat on Openness is widely embraced in the UK, and public acceptance of animal research high (75% according to Understanding Animal Research (UAR)),² historically security was a concern. Hosting the event online with potentially larger numbers of attendees required security measures such as screening in place.

Risk register

From the SWOT analysis the project appeared viable. There were still some risks to mitigate. They were presented in the risk register below (Figure 2). The level of a risk is decided between an analysis of the impact

Risk ID	Date Identified	Category	Risk	The risk is caused by	Effects of risk	Mitigation action in place	Impact level	Start Date	End Date	Results of mitigation action	Final impact level
1	Day 0	Design	Inability to secure suitable speakers.	Scheduling	The event cannot be organised.	First action on the implementation plan – schedule dates in advance – communicate clearly.				Speakers and dates confirmed early.	
2	Day 0	Resources	Inability to identify suitable software.	Technical and resources limitations.	The event cannot be hosted.	Reach out to collaborators early on and before.				Software confirmed and tested early.	
3	Day 0	Reputational	Low attendance.	Lack of interest or poor promotion.	Multiple objectives cannot be achieved.	Research and consult before establishing topics.				Strengthened interest.	
				Poor promotion.	Multiple objectives cannot be achieved.	Early active promotion.				High visibility.	
4	Day 0	Security	Security	Activism	Threats to speakers, IAT and organiser.	Speakers to be aware of potential security issues – participants will be security screened.				Lowered risk.	
5	Day 0	Resources	Speakers/host unable to attend at the last minute.	Technical and last minute issues.	Part of the event cannot take place – participants' disappointment.	Early planning – backup host – no backup options for speaker (recording would prevent questions).				Options for host – still high risk for speaker.	
6	Day 0	Resources	Technical issues.	Technical	Event delayed or less smooth.	Rehearsal before the day and speakers and host to be available 15 minutes before the start of the presentation – use a reliable platform.				Technical issues can be caught and resolved in time.	
<div> <div></div> Low impact <div></div> Medium impact <div></div> High impact </div>											

Figure 2. IAT London Branch Webinar project risk register.

of the hazard/danger coupled with the likeness of the hazard materialising. Therefore, this risk register also included actions to lessen the impact the hazards might have had and the likelihood these hazards could have become if a real situation or both.

Budget:

The IAT London branch relies on yearly membership fees from its members. Most years, this represents a sum of approximately £500. The treasury has historically been well managed, and the branch was in a healthy position financially. However, this was possible thanks to events being organised without spending much money.

This event essentially required Information Technology (I.T) and time resources. They were freely given or lent (e.g. computer) by the participants. The London branch did not provide the organiser or the speakers with any I.T. hardware. Because of the current move to home working, it was expected that the resources required would be available for all. Regarding software, a lot is available for free and it was not expected that the requirements of this event required any software to enable payments or membership. If that was the case, it was hoped that our parent organisation, the IAT, could host us as they had compatible software in place and had agreed in principle to host branches' events.

Because of the nature of the event there was no travel or physical hosting cost (e.g. catering).

Project Planning:

Implementation:

The project was aimed to take place in late summer or during the autumn. To implement the project fully, tasks were broken down into a list. Those tasks are summarised in the table below (Figure 3) as well as the

Planning the Species Month Webinar		
Activities	Length	
Identifying speakers/platform	6	weeks
Contacting speakers/explaining project	2	weeks
Convincing speakers	2	week
Agreeing on a date	2	weeks
Speakers preparing content	4	weeks
Creating advertising	2	weeks
Advertising	8	weeks
Preparing platform	1	week
Rehearsing	1	week
Hosting the webinars	4	weeks
Total	32	weeks

Figure 3. Task List and time required to complete.

predicted length of time each of these activities would take to complete.

Some tasks could not happen until a previous task was completed.

However, some tasks could happen in parallel and the project duration might be shorter than the cumulative time required for each task. This is illustrated below (shortest path in red) in a visual shortest path diagram (Figure 4). The Gantt chart (Figure 7) also shows this. This approach gave added flexibility to some tasks done in parallel. For example, speakers could be given 8 weeks to create their content. This would account for the fact that other projects might compete for their time.

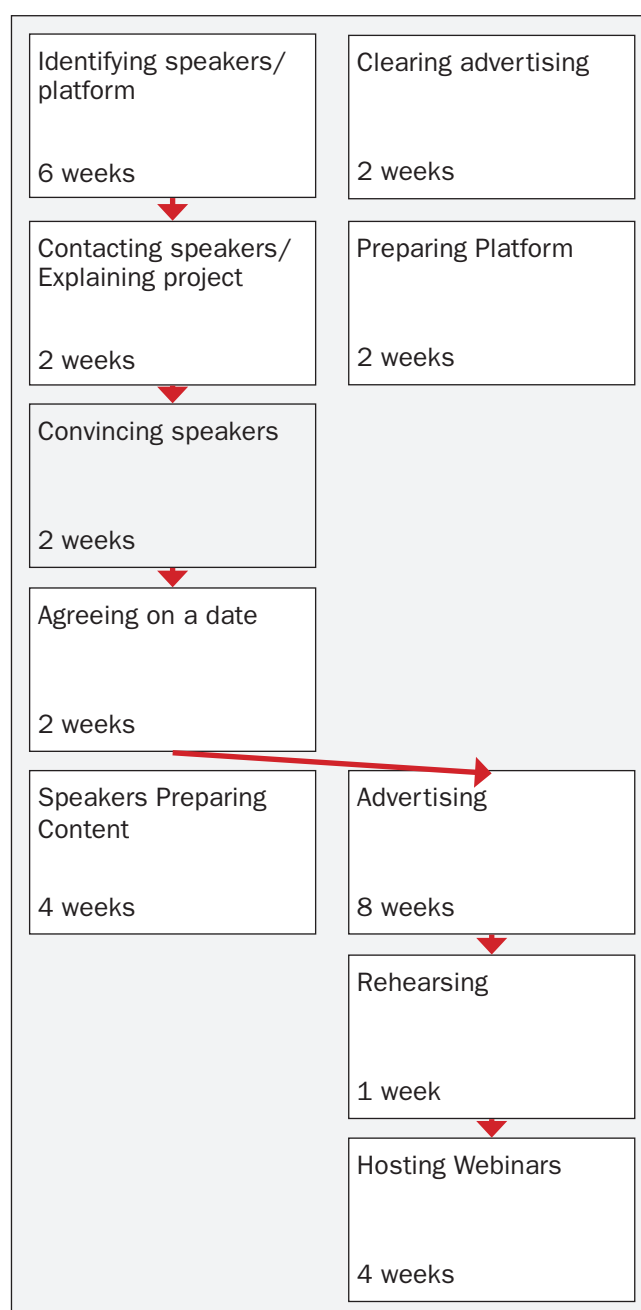


Figure 4. Shortest path to complete planning tasks.

Each task is described in more detail below:

Identifying speakers: Need for speakers with suitable expertise of species to match our event design. As a first point of call, speakers within my direct network were contacted. This demonstrates the use of building a strong and diverse network from the early stages of one's career. Members of the London branch committee were contacted first, followed by my direct colleagues, such as my Named Veterinary Surgeons (NVS). Potential speakers were identified by reviewing programmes of previous conferences. Colleagues met during conferences and my professional life were also contacted. At this stage it was expected that this should be enough to identify more than 10 speakers and hopefully attain a commitment from at least 6. However, if this was not sufficient, other strategies could be used. If it was necessary to identify more speakers, recommendations would be sought from other colleagues and institutions such as Understanding Animal Research (UAR) or the National Centre for the 3Rs (NC3Rs). LinkedIn is a powerful networking platform and could be used to identify speakers or seek recommendations. As the project lead, I found this to be an exciting part of the project. This was the opportunity to investigate, develop my network and find new ideas. Further down the line, those connections could later lead to more projects and collaborations.

Identifying platform: The platform to host the event needed to be free for all to use and user friendly. It would need to be able to host a webinar, which was a different setting than a meeting, for an hour. This involved the control for the host to disable the attendees' microphone and, less importantly, camera. It also needed the option to have written questions. The option to record the webinar would also be a plus. There are a variety of options on the market available for this type of technology.

Another platform was required for registration. The London branch regularly use Eventbrite. This website oversees registration for free when events do not require payment. The Branch had agreed from the beginning of the design stage that the event was to be free for participants. Eventbrite allowed us to set up automatic and customisable reminders (e.g. 48 hours before the event). This was used to help with security. Participants were able to register but not be sent the link for the virtual event until they have been 'security screened'.

Contacting speakers and explaining the project: The mode of communication with the speaker would depend on our relationship. Any speakers from the IAT London branch committee were aware of the project and its nature from the design stage. It was therefore easy to explain the project and ask them to present. In that case the discussion took place face to face, for example during a committee meeting. It could also be discussed

by phone, email or other mode of communications (e.g. SMS). In the case of direct colleagues such as my NVS, the project needed to be explained. This was possible to do in a non-formal manner as described previously for the IAT London branch committee members. Speakers from my direct network were contacted by email. The project was explained, as well as why they were approached in context. An offer was made to discuss this further by phone, virtual meeting or email should they have any questions.

Convincing speakers: People normally have a tendency to want to help and being recognised as a valuable source of information might be enough to convince speakers to commit to the project immediately. Some people may not be interested and refuse, usually politely from the outset. Others may have concerns about security, the time commitment required and their availability. At this stage, it was important to listen and answer their questions honestly. Putting too much pressure on speakers or being untruthful would be unproductive. It could cause late cancellation or damage your professional relationship.

Agreeing on a date: The target month was agreed by the London branch committee in advance. The speakers were made aware of this when they were first contacted and the event presented to them. In previous discussions with the committee, it was agreed that afternoons, close to last hours of the day was the time when technicians are more likely to be able to dedicate time to webinars and training in general. This was because the nature of the work. Daily animal checks are legally required to be performed and the common practice is for this to take place in the morning. Therefore, once all the speakers agreed to participate, they were sent an invitation to complete a doodle poll (online organisation software). The poll had been pre-filled by the event organiser (myself) with suitable time slots. Each speaker was asked to fill all the slots which could be suitable for them. This included 15 minutes before the presentation, to rehearse and solve any potential technical issue. To prevent double booking, they were asked to do so within a given time (e.g. 7 days). After the 7th day, the poll was closed and I attributed a suitable timeslot for all the speakers. They were informed straight away and asked to book that time in their calendar.

Speakers preparing content: The speakers were reminded of the formal online webinar. They were informed of the platform chosen and reminded how the event would take place on the day. The timeline would be:

1. Speaker to join 10-15 before the start.
2. Host to accept attendees and give an introduction – 5 minutes.
3. Speaker presents sharing his/her screen. (PowerPoint advised) – 45-50 minutes.
4. Questions and conclusion 5-10 minutes.

At this stage the speakers were reminded of the format as shown in the template below and given time to prepare their presentation.

Dear Speaker

Thank you for agreeing in principle to participate to our Species Month event by giving a presentation about “insert species”.

Please see a summary of what we are looking for:

A 45-50 minute presentation, including (this is not a strict format):

- Information about the species (origin, strains, any relevant metabolic data).
- Environmental conditions required.
- Housing (local example and pictures)
- Behaviour/Social.
- Type of research they are used for.
- Personal experience.
- 3Rs considerations.
- Anything else you think might be relevant.

5-10 minutes for questions.

Many thanks

Creating advertising: The London branch normally creates a poster, which can be used as a flyer, to promote their events. A poster for the event was created. The poster contained information about the presentation, the presenter and the time of the presentation. In summary, it needed to answer the questions: What? Who? When? Where? The Why was briefly explained as well with the following sentence. ‘More than 80% of animals used in research are rodents. Find out about the other species supporting research with the London branch.’

The links to the Eventbrite registration page needed to be on the poster as well. Therefore Eventbrite had to be set up before this task. For ease, it was possible to directly click on the link from a digital version of the poster. To help create an attractive poster, LinkedIn course, pod cast (Harvard business review, the managers tool) and HBD article were consulted for ideas. This also helped create a successful advertising strategy. Marketing is not something that is part of my professional background and this project was an enjoyable way to develop this skill.

Advertising: Timing was an important part of the advertising strategy. It was expected that people would sign up for the event either in advance or very close to the date. Timing of registration can arise from different types of human behaviours and advertising needed to capture people with those different behaviours at the right time. The timing was linked to the medium

used to promote the event. The IAT has a monthly print publication, the IAT Bulletin. To allow professional typesetting and proofreading before printing, material for publication needs to be submitted almost two months in advance. Therefore, the advertisement had to be ready 8 weeks beforehand, to be in the Bulletin for two issues and one issue before the first webinar i.e. 3 months in advance of the initial webinar. The poster also had to be disseminated by email to the branch mailing list. Recipients were encouraged to print a version of the poster and display it in their facility at strategic points (e.g. lift and tea room). The poster was made available to download on a smart phone that allowed members of the committee to easily promote the event with work colleagues via WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or LinkedIn. The advertising for this event took full advantage of traditional methods (poster, Bulletin) and newer technologies. The IAT was asked to promote the event on its social media. Since the direct link for the event was not available via the poster, this was not deemed a security risk. However, the poster was created in a manner not to present safety risk.

Preparing the platform: Each webinar was set up on the platform to create a link to be distributed. A different link was created for the host and the speaker. This gave them different options and rights during the webinar. This was also the time to start security screening the participants. Using the list provided by Eventbrite, I checked whether I or members of the committee could personally vouch for the attendees. If not, the IAT would be contacted to confirm they are on their database. People were also cross-checked using LinkedIn and institutional email addresses. In some cases, if people provided personal addresses, they may be asked by email for proof of their identity or a professional email address.

Rehearsing: The host had at least one test session to familiarise himself to the hosting function of the platform used. Speakers were given the opportunity to have a practice session before the webinar should they wish to do so. 10-15 minutes were allocated before each webinar to have a very quick rehearsal. This allowed checking to ensure the speaker was comfortable with the software as well and that the presentation, including sounds and video, could be shared. This insured the parameters such as the sound volume, quality of image and microphone, were acceptable.

Hosting the Webinars: the event started on time following the timings previously explained.

- Speaker joined 10-15 minutes before the start.
- Host accepted attendees and gave an introduction – 5 minutes.
- Speaker gave presentation sharing his/her screen (PowerPoint advised) – 45-50 minutes.
- Question(s) conclusion 5-10 minutes.

Stakeholder engagement (including communication plan)

The IAT London branch committee had direct communication (Figure 5), either during a physical or virtual meeting at the design stage. Communication then took place by email. The other committee members were updated when specific processes had been completed. For example, once the presenters were identified, committee members were given a chance to express an opinion by email before they were contacted. They received the poster to express their feedback prior to it being circulated. When the event was fully organised, they were given the promotional material in order for them to promote it.

Employers were made aware of the project at the beginning. However, it was expected that once their support had been given, limited communication with them would be necessary. They did however need to be

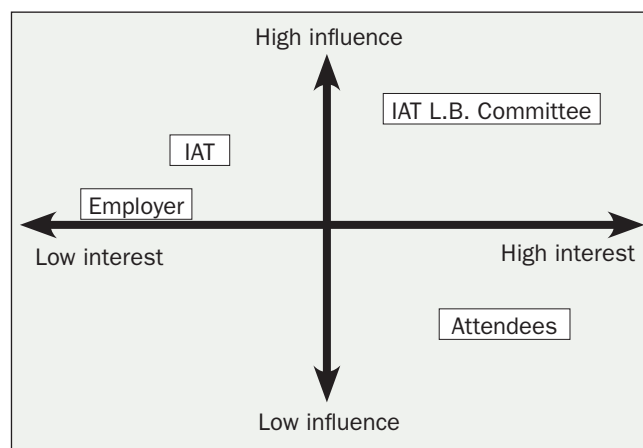


Figure 5. Stakeholder engagement – direct communication.

involved, or be aware of the scheduling step, depending on their own internal planning process. This ensured the speaker was free and was not asked to participate in other activities at the time of the webinar.

Risk register

Risk ID	Date Identified	Category	Risk	The risk is caused by	Effects of risk	Mitigation action in place	Impact level	Start Date	End Date	Results of mitigation action	Final impact level
1	Day 0	Design	Inability to secure suitable speakers.	Scheduling	The event cannot be organised.	First action on the implementation plan – scheduled dates in advance – communicate clearly.	Low impact	Day 1	Day 35	Speakers and dates confirmed early.	High impact
2	Day 0	Resources	Inability to identify suitable software.	Technical and resources limitations.	The event cannot be hosted.	Reach to collaborators early on and before.	Low impact	Day 15	Day 30	Software confirmed and tested early.	High impact
3	Day 0	Reputational	Low attendance.	Lack of interest or poor promotion.	Multiple objectives cannot be achieved.	Research and consult before establishing topics.	Medium impact	Day 0	Day 30	Strengthened interest.	High impact
				Poor promotion.	Multiple objectives cannot be achieved.	Early active promotion.		Day 30	Day 150 – Event day	High visibility.	
4	Day 0	Security	Security	Activism	Threats to speakers, IAT and organiser.	Speakers to be aware of potential security issues – participants will be security screened.	Low impact	Day 40	Day 150 – Event day	Lowered risk.	Medium impact
5	Day 0	Resources	Speakers/host unable to attend at the last minute.	Technical and last minute issues.	Part of the event cannot take place – participants disappointment.	Early planning – backup host – no backup options for speaker (recording would prevent questions).	Low impact	Day 50	Day 70	Options for host – still high risk for speaker.	Medium impact
6	Day 0	Resources	Technical issues.	Technical	Event delayed or less smooth.	Rehearsal before the day and speakers and host to be available 15 minutes before the start of the presentation – use a reliable platform.	Medium impact	Day 130	Day 150 – Event day	Technical issues can be caught and resolved in time.	High impact

Low impact
 Medium impact
 High impact

Figure 6. Risk Register.

Assignment 2

Implementation delivery method

This project was delivered based on the task and methodology described in the scoping and planning document. However smaller details had to be adjusted at the time. Also, the timeline and planned order of the tasks (as shown on the Gantt chart) had to be flexible. Some tasks were delivered faster than anticipated which offered resilience when some tasks took longer.

A more detailed description for each task can be found below.

Identifying speakers: Early in the project, two speakers from the London branch committee volunteered to present. They had both hosted physical visits in the past and were supportive of the concept. One of the speakers was the person who suggested transforming this event to online presentations. I also knew that the unit I managed housed rabbits and was confident that we could deliver a presentation about them. To facilitate hosting, I approached my NVS to do this presentation although my deputy would have also been a suitable choice. Other speakers were approached within my network. I presented the project to a colleague I met during a College of Laboratory Animal Science and Technology (CLAST) course and Institute of Animal Technology meeting for her work with farm animals. I also contacted a previous colleague from my days at Cancer Research UK who I knew to be working at London Zoo. We also had two previous contacts that expressed interest in our initiative the previous year but could not participate for various reasons. Finally, more speakers were identified by browsing previous conference programmes and from past meetings with them. The IAT Annual Congress and the West Middlesex Branch Technician Symposium are reputable quality events and there were plenty of suitable speakers they had invited in the past.

Identifying platform: the platform to host the event was for some time a challenging decision. Two contenders emerged early on: Microsoft Teams and Zoom. It was eventually decided to use Zoom for multiple reasons. Unlike Microsoft Teams, Zoom is free to use as a participant. This made the event more accessible. Early in the pandemic, many people started using this platform, so it was expected that participants would be familiar and comfortable with it.

The IAT has a commercial account which is accessible to branches free of charge, this allowed the branch to access some more advanced functions such as the webinar settings which allows written Q&A. Thanks to the IAT, this was done without changing our budget for this event or signing up to a long-time contract with a software company.

We also needed a platform to regulate the registration. The London branch has relied on Eventbrite for this for the last couple of years and did so again in this case.

Contacting speakers and explaining the project: Two speakers from the London branch agreed to participate during a committee meeting reviewing our plans for this event. The NVS from Surrey University was approached directly during an informal catch up. The event and its concept as well as the time frame was briefly presented verbally. Old colleagues were contacted either via LinkedIn, email or direct messages depending on the level and mode of correspondence previously used. To contact previous speakers, this was done via email which was deemed more formal. The presenting template in the planning document was used. The speakers' contact details were generally available. On two occasions, an email was directly sent to the Director of Biological Services (found either on LinkedIn or via institutional webpage) to ask for a suitable speaker to present the work done on a specific species. The advantage to this approach ensured local senior stakeholder support for the project early on.

Convincing speakers: The speakers from the London branch were committed from the beginning. The NVS from my unit has always been extremely pro-active in term of openness and gave an agreement in principal during our initial conversation. Others were very supportive of the idea but expressed quickly that they would not feel comfortable giving a presentation. In two cases, their team was too small to be able to suggest an alternative speaker. Those two people were thanked for considering this project and told that if they changed their minds, we would be happy to discuss a presentation from them next year.

In two other cases other suitable speakers were suggested and they readily accepted to join the project. Finally, one of the speakers approached had previously presented at the IAT Congress. After a couple of additional questions, mostly logistical in nature, this speaker agreed to join this project.

Agreeing on a date: The target month was agreed by the London branch Committee in advance. This was originally September 2020. The speakers were made aware of this when they were first contacted and the event was presented to them. However, this timing changed early in the organisation of this event, as other time pressures linked to the pandemic occurred. The speakers were sent an invitation to complete a Doodle Poll (online organisation software). The poll had been pre-filled by the event organiser with suitable time slots. The speakers were asked to fill all the slots which could be suitable for them. This included 15 minutes before the presentation, to rehearse and address any potential technical issues. The poll was created and shared on a Monday morning. To prevent double booking, they were

asked to complete the poll by the end of the week. Once the poll had been closed, I assigned a suitable timeslot to all the speakers. They were informed of this straight away and asked to reserve that time in their calendar.

Speakers preparing content: The speakers were reminded of the form (online webinar). They were informed that Zoom was the platform chosen and were also reminded how the event will take place on the day:

- Speaker to join 10-15 before the start.
- Host to accept attendees and give an introduction – 5 minutes.
- Speaker gives presentation sharing his/her screen. (PowerPoint advised) – 45-50 minutes.
- Question(s) conclusion 5-10 minutes.

The speakers were also reminded of the content expected as well as encouraged to prepare their presentation using Ms PowerPoint.

Dear Speaker

Thank you for agreeing in principle to participate to our Species Month event by giving a presentation about “insert species”.

Please see a summary of what we are looking for:

A 45-50 minute presentation, including (this is not a strict format):

- Information about the species (origin, strains, any relevant metabolic data).
- Environmental conditions.
- Housing (local example and pictures)
- Behaviour/Social.
- Type of research they are used for.
- Personal experience.
- 3Rs considerations.
- Anything else you think might be relevant.





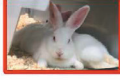

5-10 minutes for questions.

Many thanks

Creating Advertising: The London branch normally creates a poster, which can be used as a flyer, to promote its event. I created the poster for this event which was based on a template previously created by the Branch Secretary. The poster contained information about the presentations, the presenters and the time of the presentations. In summary, it answered the questions: What? Who? When? Where? The links to the Eventbrite registration page were on the poster as well. This first draft was sent to the Branch Secretary for her input. After a few changes, the poster (Figure 8) was agreed for use.

IAT London branch Species Month

More than 80% of animals used in research are mice and rats. Find out more about the other species with the London branch on zoom

- 
❖ Opossums
 13/11/2020 - 14:00 to 15:00
 Caroline Zverev and Claire Lathlean | Senior Technicians | The Francis Crick Institute
 Link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/species-month-opossums-tickets-125285354869>
- 
❖ Minipigs
 18/11/2020 - 15:00 to 16:00
 Adrian Zeltner | Laboratory technician | Ellegaard Göttingen Minipigs
 Link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/species-month-minipigs-tickets-125303037759>
- 
❖ Naked Mole rat
 20/11/2020 - 15:00 to 16:00
 Chris G. Faulkes | Reader in Evolutionary Ecology | Queen Mary University London
 Link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/species-month-naked-mole-rats-tickets-125304116987>
- 
❖ Xenopus
 25/11/2020 - 15:00 to 16:00
 Gabrielle Sturges | Deputy Manager | University College London
 Link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/species-month-xenopus-tickets-125304945465>
- 
❖ Rabbits
 26/11/2020 - 15:00 to 16:00
 Anna Slaviero | Preclinical researcher/NVS | University of Surrey
 Link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/species-month-rabbits-tickets-125305304539>
- 
❖ Zebrafish
 27/11/20 - 15:00 to 16:00
 Dimitra Mantzorou | Laboratory Technician | Kings College London
 Link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/species-month-zebrafishes-tickets-125306327599>

FREE Webinars

icat Institute of Animal Technology

Figure 8: Poster used to advertise the event.

Advertising: The event was advertised almost 4 weeks ahead of the first webinar (Figure 8). It was initially sent via email by the branch secretary to all the members on our mailing list.

It was also sent to the IAT Bulletin Editor. Unfortunately, the deadline to be included in the November edition had been missed. Other avenues were therefore used. The poster was sent to the Animal Welfare and Management Discussion Group (AWMDG). This is a very useful mailing list for information exchange and discussion between workers involved in animal research in the UK. I considered sending the information on the Anilab mailing list as well (French equivalent of AWMDG) but decided against it as the presentations were in English. The poster was also shared on LinkedIn, on the IAT event page and the IAT social media pages.

Preparing the platform: The preparation on Zoom for each event required the creation of an individual event for each webinar and selected webinar format. The links then needed to be available to be communicated. This was kindly set up by the IAT Website Coordinator. A master word document was created to keep a track of the relevant information for each event (e.g. link, speaker, time).

The same process was done on Eventbrite to create the registration links (Figure 9). As Eventbrite is the platform used to encourage attendees to register, it was set up with text about the event and suitable pictures. In cases, the pictures were directly obtained from the speaker (e.g. Göttingen minipigs), in others, they were sourced from an online picture bank. An automatic message was also created to thank attendees for registering. Another one was created to be sent as a reminder 48 hours before the webinar.

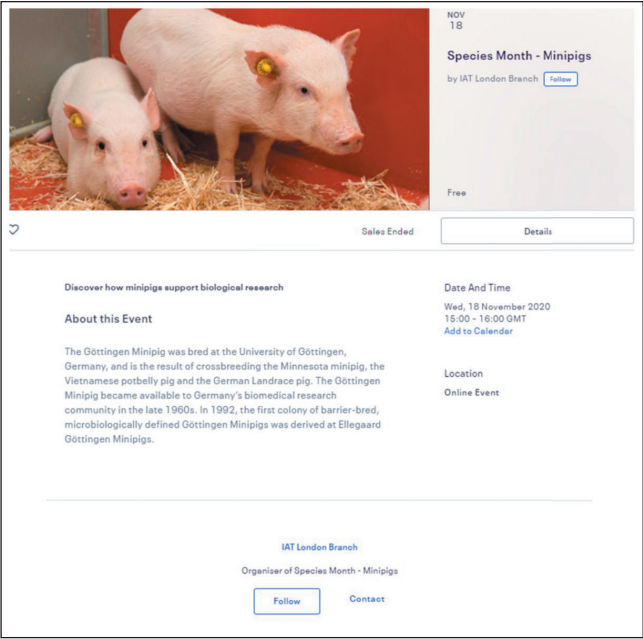


Figure 9. Example of pictures used on Eventbrite platform.

Rehearsing: As the host, I had one rehearsal session with the IAT Website Administrator. Only two speakers (from the same webinar) decided to take advantages of the offer to rehearse in advance. However, for each webinar, the speaker(s) and the host started 15 minutes before the official start of the webinar. This proved to be enough time to rehearse. This was also a welcome chance to ensure everyone was on the same page, relaxed and enthusiastic.

Managing participants and attendees: This task had not been fully anticipated. In the past, especially in the UK, animal research has been heavily criticised by a portion of the population. This in time resulted in threatening, aggressive or violent action from such individuals. At present, recent surveys suggest 2/3 of the UK population is overall supportive of animal research. However, the London branch reserved the right for attendance not to be granted to individuals that might create a security risk. To ensure this, no link was given until each attendee had been vetted. This process ended up taking some time and was challenging. A proportion of the attendees were known to me but the email addresses used were checked nonetheless, to confirm they matched the known ones. Other people were confirmed via the institutional address and institution register or via LinkedIn. Some

attendees were checked against the IAT database. To follow General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules, this is not accessible to the London branch but the IAT was able to assist us with this. In some case, individuals were contacted directly using the email address used to register, via the general London branch email. Only two participants were not sent the link for the webinar after their registration. But this process proved more time consuming than expected and, in some cases, required express checks for attendees registering at the last minute. (Registration was closing one hour before the event.)

Hosting the webinars: Once the rehearsal had taken place, participants were allowed to join the webinar. As the host, I began the introduction shortly after the given start time. This gave some leeway for latecomers to join. The introduction covered a brief explanation of the event and introduced the speakers as well as some technical information about the platform used (e.g. attendees are muted but can ask questions using the Q&A chat). The presentation then started and lasted 40 to 50 minutes. After the presentation, I thanked the speaker and reminded everyone to write their question(s). I then read the questions to the speakers and aimed for this to feel more like an actual conversation than a panel interview. At the end of the event, speaker(s) and attendees were thanked again and reminded of the next webinar(s) due to take place.

Project results

The event took place in November 2020 with the first webinar on the 13th November and the last one on the 27th November. Six webinars took place (Figure 10). The shortest one lasted 50 minutes and the longest one lasted 65 minutes. Attendance was good overall. With the event being free, it was unclear what conversion rate from registration to attendance was to be expected.

Feedback from participants was good with many attendees signing up for additional webinars or more than one, after attending one.

Event	Registered	Attended	Conversion (%)	Left before the end
Opossums	45	20	44.44	0
Minipigs	46	24	52.17	0
Naked moles rats	51	28	54.90	0
Xenopus	63	36	57.14	1
Rabbits	51	26	50.98	0
Zebrafish	68	42	61.76	2

Figure 10. Webinar attendance.

Stakeholder management report

Perhaps surprisingly, I found that most stakeholders did not really engage with this project until at very late stages of it, (Figure 11) or until its completion.

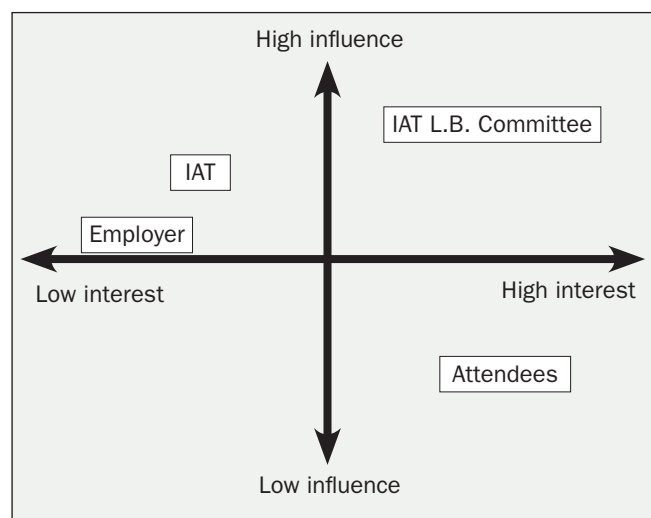


Figure 11. Stakeholder management report.

The Branch Committee was very involved in the initial stage, especially when formalising the concept of this project. Thereafter, a regular communication by email when milestones were reached seemed sufficient.

The IAT historically has given some freedom to the branches and has been more involved at the feedback stage than during the conception. However regular communication was required with a specific member of the IAT Council who oversees the IAT's website. This member was extremely helpful in setting up the Zoom webinars. As soon as dates were agreed, this was communicated to the IAT Website Coordinator.

Speakers, in general, had the seniority to organise their own time. They were responsible for confirming they had their employer's approval to take part in this project.

Once the event was ready to be advertised, attendees did require a higher level of communication. They needed regular reminders and clear joining instructions. Those were included in the pre-event reminder to have them at the top of their inboxes on the day of each webinar. There were also questions about the content of the webinars and some technical queries around registration and whether the presentation would be recorded and available later. Because of the demand this was discussed with the IAT Website Coordinator (for feasibility) and the speakers (for their agreement). It was decided to record the presentations and make them available. At the time of writing the presentations available on YouTube have been seen in comparable numbers to the numbers of live attendees.

Updated risk register

Overall the mitigation of risk, as described in the risk register (Figure 12), mostly brought the risk to a very low level. None of the risks identified ever materialised.

Budget management review

This project did not incur any costs to the IAT London branch. The cost of the Zoom platform was kindly covered by the IAT.

Time was a significant resource for this project, albeit, every participant gave their time freely.

At the beginning of this project, I anticipated 1 to 2 hours of work per week would be required. In some cases, it was significantly less. Convincing speakers became being quite simple and I was impressed by the general spirit of our professional community. Other tasks took a lot longer. Creating advertising required input from other people and some speakers were very specific about which information or pictures they wanted associated with their presentation. This created a bit more communication and more time was required to complete this task. In future, I will have a template ready and ask the speakers to complete it themselves to ensure they are happy with the information used.

Evaluation

Methodology analysis:

A few events happened during this project that had not been fully anticipated.

The first factor was my own time. When I started this project, my day job was relatively quiet but at some critical moments, it became busier. I dealt with this by starting my day earlier, as I am more of an early riser than a night owl! This was partly responsible for why the project was delivered in November instead of September. With a day job that is relatively unpredictable, in the future I would try to be ahead for the planning of such projects where possible. I would also involve more people from the committee, so we could assist each other. With most of the organisation of this event relying on me, the London branch took a risk in terms of contingency. Therefore, in the future I would again involve more people from the committee. I would also save documents and correspondence in a centralised way for them to be more accessible. During this project, all the information was stored on the 'cloud' and locally for safeguarding but it was only accessible by me.

Some speakers identified were only contacted in writing. Very few declined to participate. However I believe that in the future I will ask for a short conversation (phone

Risk register

Risk ID	Date Identified	Category	Risk	The risk is caused by	Effects of risk	Mitigation action in place	Impact level	Start Date	End Date	Results of mitigation action	Final impact level
1	Day 0	Design	Inability to secure suitable speakers.	Scheduling	The event cannot be organised.	First action on the implementation plan – scheduled dates in advance – communicate clearly.	Low impact	Day 1	Day 35	Speakers and dates confirmed early.	High impact
2	Day 0	Resources	Inability to identify suitable software.	Technical and resources limitations.	The event cannot be hosted.	Reach to collaborators early on and before.	Low impact	Day 15	Day 30	Software confirmed and tested early.	High impact
3	Day 0	Reputational	Low attendance.	Lack of interest or poor promotion.	Multiple objectives cannot be achieved.	Research and consult before establishing topics.	Medium impact	Day 0	Day 30	Strengthened interest.	High impact
				Poor promotion.	Multiple objectives cannot be achieved.	Early active promotion.	Medium impact	Day 30	Day 150 – Event day	High visibility.	High impact
4	Day 0	Security	Security	Activism	Threats to speakers, IAT and organiser.	Speakers to be aware of potential security issues – participants will be security screened.	Low impact	Day 40	Day 150 – Event day	Lowered risk.	Medium impact
5	Day 0	Resources	Speakers/ host unable to attend at the last minute.	Technical and last minute issues.	Part of the event cannot take place – participants disappointment.	Early planning – backup host – no backup options for speaker (recording would prevent questions).	Low impact	Day 50	Day 70	Options for host – still high risk for speaker.	Medium impact
6	Day 0	Resources	Technical issues.	Technical	Event delayed or less smooth.	Rehearsal before the day and speakers and host to be available 15 minutes before the start of the presentation – use a reliable platform.	Medium impact	Day 130	Day 150 – Event day	Technical issues can be caught and resolved in time.	High impact
<div> <div>Low impact</div> <div>Medium impact</div> <div>High impact</div> </div>											

Figure 12. Risk Register.

or in person) or a virtual meeting to pitch the project. I believe it is possible that those people who declined could have been convinced had they been approached differently.

In the past, London branch events have been attended by well known people in our community or industry. With this format, we had attendees from all around the country and even a few international ones (e.g. Iran, Spain, Australia). While it was great for the branch and the industry to see professionals from so many places taking part, it made the safety checks more challenging. In the future, I would include on the Eventbrite page a disclaimer such as: ‘This event is designed for professionals and to be a place for learning. The London branch reserves the right to refuse registration for people without a genuine professional interest. To facilitate this, please register with your professional email address instead of your personal one’.

Stakeholders feedback

Informal feedback was given by attendees. It was always positive as demonstrated in the example below:

“Thank you very much to IAT London branch for these webinars. An excellent contribution. I’ve learnt plenty about several species I’ve not worked with. Geoff H.”

All the speakers thanked the London branch for the organisation and making the event an easy one for them to participate in.

The London branch committee was pleased with the event as demonstrated by this quotation from the minutes of the committee meeting held on the 16th of December 2020:

‘It was discussed what a success this was and RL was congratulated on his hosting of these webinars. GS and

DM as committee members did an amazing job presenting their webinars.'

The feedback from IAT Council appeared to be positive. This event was used as an example to other branches to carry out putting on events during the pandemic.

Budget review

The IAT London branch is a not-for-profit organisation and aims for its events to be affordable. On this occasion we did not need to invest in any specific hardware as every participant, including myself as project lead, had access to computers and the appropriate software already.

To reduce expenditure, we normally give more in time and this was true for this project. In the implementation stage, 1 to 2 hours per week were forecasted to be required during the 24 weeks' life cycle of this project. In reality, some weeks required 2-4 hours of work and some required less. More time was spent in the first few weeks launching the project and being ahead of the curve. This gave me more flexibility further down the line. With the pressure of my day job and my personal life, this flexibility proved most useful. Some tasks, such as identifying speakers and convincing them to participate in the event proved both faster and easier than anticipated. Others were longer or even not expected. The 'security screening' of attendees before releasing the link to the webinar was a surprisingly demanding task. This was partially due to screening attendees, who unlike for most events we organise, we did not personally know. In future, this task will be simplified by encouraging attendees to register with an institutional email address.

Overall, the project was delivered within the 36-40 hours of work forecasted. However, I often found myself either ahead or behind this forecast, with peaks and valleys of activities instead of the steady 1 to 2 hours per week expected.

Lessons learned

I deeply enjoyed working on this project and I sometimes wished I had more time available to dedicate to it.

In the past, I have started projects with collaborators who were not completely dedicated. This had caused them to change their mind halfway or even cancel the project completely, sometimes resulting in the project being non-viable at the end. I had started this project with the general ambition to do most of it on my own to avoid a similar situation. While I took the lead on most activities, I found myself enjoying the support given by my colleagues. I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few: Rebecca Towns, our Branch Secretary was

incredibly helpful in creating the poster and advertising the event. As Chair of the Branch, I asked a lot of her and she always came through. Allan Thornhill, IAT Website Coordinator, was so efficient in creating the event on Zoom. Furthermore, he was always available to provide guidance and discuss ideas such as recording the event. Therefore, I would not want to do projects fully on my own in the future as there is too much to gain by collaborating. I will however get everyone to agree on the plan, in writing before we start. I hope this will allow for collaboration while preventing unpleasant surprises.

I also realised how enjoyable it could be to start something different. I have learned new skills which I hope to use again and the confidence to try. Furthermore, I have appreciated some variety in my professional life.

Regarding the project, I have learned the benefit of proper planning. Going forward, I will aim to spend more time in planning to save a lot of time in implementation. I thought I was doing it already but there is always more planning that can be done. I have learnt which management tools were useful to me and at which stage. The SWOT analysis was helpful to assess the viability of the project more than it was in planning it. However, it made the creation of a Risk Register and Risk Management Plan much easier. I have found the Gantt chart useful to keep track of the project and to know when I should be catching up as well as when things were on track and I could allow myself a chance to recharge my batteries.

I have also learned how easy it is to underestimate the time required to do any single task, as well as the pressure of other competitive interests, both professional and personal. I will now be more generous when estimating time resources required to complete task, especially when they are new.

References

- ¹ **Institute of Animal Technology**
<https://www.iat.org.uk>
- ² **Understanding Animal Research**
<https://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/resources/infographics/>