



Centre for
**Society and
Mental Health**

THE CSMH PODCASTING TOOLKIT

Leading a guest podcast episode: A guide for researchers



Economic
and Social
Research Council

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Before you start

What is a podcast?

According to our good friend Wikipedia, a podcast is an “*episodic series of spoken word digital audio files that a user can download to a personal device for easy listening*”.

Podcasts are a powerful communication tool, which have maintained popularity over the last few years. No longer a tool just for media savvy producers, many academics and higher education institutions have created their own podcasts to engage wider audiences with their work.



What are the benefits of creating an episode for an established podcast?

Creating a podcast episode which effectively communicates research and its importance relies on skills not usually well-practiced in academia. Although challenging, the process has many benefits. Not only can researchers strengthen their confidence and communication skills, but also their ability to:

- Identify and prioritise stakeholders
- Engage and expand networks
- Define objectives for public engagement and knowledge exchange activities
- Manage projects, resources and budgets
- Develop / contribute to marketing plans
- Monitor and evaluate impact

Most importantly, a podcast can increase the visibility of King’s research and facilitate engagement and collaboration between our academics and wider society.

So what is this toolkit all about?

This is one of three guides which have been designed to show social science researchers* based at King's College London, at any level, how they can use podcasts to disseminate their work.

One example we will keep returning to is [Our Sick Society](#), a mental health podcast by the [ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health](#). This podcast was funded by the King's Impact Acceleration Account, and was co-created by:

- a senior academic with experience of podcasting and radio broadcasting
- two early career researchers from the Centre
- an expert by experience
- a professional podcast producer
- the Centre's professional services team

The podcast project had three aims:

- To produce content shaped by experts by experience, hearing their voices as presenters and as well as interviewees
- Build the capacity of the early career researcher and expert by experience team members to communicate and engage stakeholders via podcasting
- Share expertise developed throughout the project to the wider King's community

This is one of three guides which have been written to address our final aim - the publication of a comprehensive toolkit to share expertise, tips and tricks for researchers interested in podcasting. The other guides cover:

- Creating a social science podcast
- Being interviewed for a podcast

* academics in other fields may also find this toolkit helpful, but we use examples of content, stakeholders and topics drawn from social science research.

Contents

Click the images to be taken to each section.



1. Before you say yes

6 - 10



2. Planning the episode

11 - 17



3: Equipment

18 - 19



4. Pre-Production

20 - 24



5. Production

25 - 35



6. Post-Production

36 - 44



7. Evaluating success

45 - 46

Section 1: Before you say yes

While it is tempting to say yes to every opportunity to publicise your work, the reality is that there is often little return for your time and efforts. Before saying yes to developing an episode, you should consider the following:

Setting personal objectives

Basically, what is in it for you? Could you:

- Find a new audience for a particular research paper or other output?
- Make new contacts or networks through participation? Either with the podcast team, other guests or listeners.
- Demonstrate your expertise or specialism in a particular area? Great for the CV!
- Improve your confidence in project management, public speaking, or engagement?

Outline a brief list of personal objectives, and make sure they are **SMART!**

- **Specific:** includes a clear and narrow description of your objective
- **Measurable:** outlines metrics to track and evaluate success
- **Achievable:** realistic and motivating, not overly ambitious and off-putting
- **Relevant:** contributes to your wider project goals and purpose
- **Time-bound:** uses deadlines and milestones for reflection and learning



Complete **Task A** on p8 to outline your personal objectives

What to know about the podcast

It is important to find out more about the podcast before you agree to lead an episode:

- **The theme** – what topics do they cover and why?
- **Their target audience** – who listens?

- **Their brand** – what do they represent? What is their tone and approach?
- **Their format** - do they have a set format for episodes?
- **Their content** - what type of content do they include?
- **Key contributors** – what type of guests do they have?
- **Reach** – how many people listen and how much engagement do they receive?



Complete **Task B** on p9 to log information about the podcast

What will you have to do?

Find out how much work will actually be involved in designing an episode. Discover:

- Whether you are producing, hosting or both
- How much time you have to prepare the episode
- If you have full control over the episode design and format, or if they have a set episode duration and structure you need to stick to
- If you need to be involved in or lead the editing process
- If you will have production support throughout the process. If yes – when and how?
- If you are needed to promote the episode. If yes - through which channels and what type of content do you need to prepare?
- How will success be measured? What do you need to do to support evaluation?

Time is also precious in other ways - you can always charge a participation fee!



Complete **Task C** on p10 to log information about your role

Once you have this information, reflect on your personal objectives and decide whether participating will be a good use of your time.

A: Set your SMART objectives

Complete the below activity to identify your personal SMART objectives.

<p>SPECIFIC Should include an answer to “who, what, when, where or why”.</p>	
<p>MEASURABLE How will you determine success? Use metrics and or deadlines.</p>	
<p>ACHIEVABLE How will you make this happen? What skills/support will you need?</p>	
<p>RELEVANT How does this objective contribute to your career and professional development goals?</p>	
<p>TIME-BOUND When will this objective be achieved? What are your deadlines?</p>	

B: Podcast information

Complete the table below

Theme – what topics do they cover and why?	
Target audience – who listens?	
Brand – what do they represent? What is their tone and approach?	
Format and content – what format is used and what type of content is included in episodes?	
Key contributors – what type of guests do they have?	
Reach – how many people listen and how much audience engagement do they receive?	

C: My role and responsibilities

Complete the table below

When does the episode have to be completed by and when does it go live?	
How long is the episode? What format will it use and how many guests will I need?	
Am I just hosting or will I be editing too? If editing, do I need to complete a paper edit, audio edit or both?	
What production support will be provided?	
How will the episode be promoted and what do I need to do to support?	
How will success be measured and what is my role in evaluation?	

Section 2: Planning the episode

Request a brief

Before you start planning the episode, ask the producer to provide a brief for episode development. How much information they provide will depend on how you were introduced to the project - for example, whether you were invited or if you pitched an episode to the team. Either way, they may have set guidance on key messages or topics they want you to cover, as well as the format and duration of the episodes.

Telling the story

Every episode should be designed to tell a story to the audience. As with any good story, you'll need to include some key components:

A clear and relatable setting

When planning each episode, ask yourself:

- What is the episode about? What topic(s) will it explore?
- How does this episode relate or contribute to the podcast theme?
- What are the key questions it will ask and hopefully answer?
- Will the target audience find it interesting?

Keep in mind that the shape and direction of your episode could change as recordings take place. New topics or angles could arise, resulting in a shift of focus.

A varied cast of characters

This refers to both the host and your guests. Who can help you explore topics, answer questions, and most importantly, make content interesting and relevant for the target audience?

As a rule, academics can talk about research and evidence, but to make that evidence come alive you might have to include those with lived experience.

Create a long list of possible guests. See if your colleagues or the production team have contacts who would like to put themselves or others forward. You can also reach out to your department or internal networks to find participants, such as the [King's Engaged Researcher Network](#) or [King's & London](#).

Review your list and consider:

- Are there are balanced views?
- Are your guests diverse and representative?
- Are you taking an interdisciplinary approach to finding your answers?



You may be familiar with the work of preferred guests, but it is helpful to do some background research to determine if they will make a good guest. Find examples of:

- **Public speaking:** can they engage audiences, ideally non-academic, with their work? Does their speaking tone and style fit with the podcast?
- **Media articles or blogs:** have they written for, or been quoted by, non-academic media? How do they come across?
- **Their own websites or social media accounts:** what content do they share? How is content presented? Do they already have an audience for their work?

There is a fine line between background research and stalking, so do stick to professional profiles! However, keep in mind that listeners may do their own research after listening to the episode. It is good to be aware of things, positive and negative, that they might find.

Remember that not everyone from your list will be able to make time during your recording window, and others may drop out at the last minute. Have some back-ups!

An easy to follow format

There several formats to choose from to help you tell the story, and each one will affect who you ask to contribute to the discussion, and how.

Note: The podcast team may already have decided on a particular format - so you may not have a choice about which one is used.

Let's look at pros, cons and examples of different formats.

Documentary style

A series of interviews with different people, edited together with a presenter links.

- ✓ Fast-moving storytelling with lots of different voices
Creates a varied listening experience in terms of pace, tone and content
- ✗ Relies on effective interview skills and creativity to bring episode together
Very time consuming - for recording, transcription and editing



[Our Sick Society: Covid-19, Quarantine and Community](#)

In conversation with

AKA the “interview format” where the host(s) leads a conversation with guests.

- ✓ Quick and relatively easy to set up and record
Very naturalistic and easy to listen to (when it goes well!)
- ✗ Relies on what people say, how they say it, and the relationship between them.
If conversation gets stilted, goes off topic, or becomes long-winded, it can be difficult to edit without interrupting the flow of the episode



[Our Sick Society: Recovery and Lockdown](#)



There is a worked example of this format in [Section 6: Post-production](#).

Roundtable

Not dissimilar to panel discussions. When a group of people discuss a topic, with a chairperson (likely your host) to keep everyone on track.

- ✓ Relatively easy to set up once you have found a time that suits everyone
Quick to record
Guests tend to bounce off each other, with conversation bringing new insight
- ✗ Guests may talk over each other, which could become distracting
Timeframe can easily over-run or go off-track
Can be difficult to edit without interrupting the flow





[Our Sick Society: Race, Employment and Health](#)

Sometimes a roundtable-style episode is recorded as part of an event in front of a live audience – this requires the host to consider all the aspects of a live event AND the podcast episode. It can get complicated, but an effective chair should be able to make a pretty good job of hosting a roundtable format.

Solo monologue



The listener only hears from one host who tells the story, no guests. More experienced and/or instinctive podcasters might choose a solo monologue format. This format is not for the faint hearted, but when it works, it can be very, very effective.

-  It's easy! The team only has to rely on one person.
Creates a bond with your listeners – you are speaking directly to them.
-  Requires a lot of talking!
The host needs to find a balance between being scripted and sounding natural.

 [The Moth: Planting Roots by Andrew Mude](#)

Co-host

Where two or more hosts discuss something together, but as co-presenters rather than interviewee and interviewer.

-  Popular with many listeners
Easy to listen to, particularly when the hosts have rapport
-  Requires some scripting, even rehearsal, for longer episodes
Relies on good scheduling over a long period, if repeating for a whole series

 [Say Why To Drugs: Psychedelics](#)

An interesting and well-paced plot

Once you have decided on your format, it is helpful to outline how content will flow together to present your story. Many podcasts will divide their content into three:

- **Part 1:** Setting the scene, laying groundwork about why the topic is important. This is a great opportunity to introduce yourself, your research, and your interest in this topic.

- **Part 2:** Asking and answering key questions, presenting a 'conflict' to overcome (e.g. contrasting views, a specific challenge or aspect of the topic - something to tie content together and move the story along).
- **Part 3:** Drawing together answers and making conclusions.

How content is edited together will depend on the length of the episodes. For example, if your episode has to last for 30 minutes, and you interview 5 people, by the time you include an introduction, closing credits, and presenter links, you are only giving guests 3 – 5 minutes of content each, which may be cut up across the episode.

The duration of the episode may already be pre-determined - check with the production team

An impactful ending

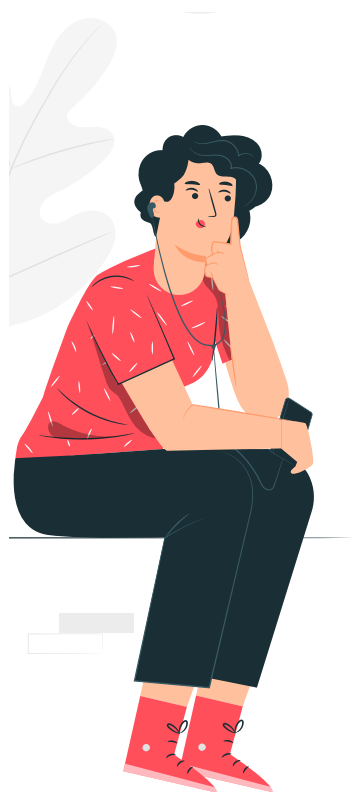
Use your ending to invite the listener to reflect on content discussed in the episode, and how it relates to them.

Depending on the topics or content shared, you may also want to include a call to action for your audience when you close each episode. This could include:

- Where to find information about about your work and that of your guests
- Where to find related content (e.g. papers or books)
- Sources of support for those affected by content
- A request to leave a review or subscribe

Make sure you allocate enough time for content at the end of each episode, and have a think about where information could sit so that it is accessible for all audiences.

The producer may ask you to record specific instructions or



Complete **Tasks D and E** on p16 and 17 to outline an episode and prepare a workplan.

D: Episode outline

Use this template to plan each episode.

Working title	
Topic(s)	
Links to podcast theme	
Links to other episodes	
Key questions	
Host	
Guests	
Format	
Basic structure	<i>Setting the scene - why is this topic important? Who leads?</i>
	<i>Key questions - what is the order? Who asks/answers?</i>
	<i>Conclusions - who does this? Key takeaways? What next?</i>
Calls to action	

E: Prepare your workplan

Answer the questions below to inform a workplan for your episode. We recommend using a [Gantt Chart](#) or similar project management tool.

- How long will it take to secure guests and a recording space for the episode?
- How long does it take to record?
- How much time will you give for guests to provide consent?
- How long will it take to provide transcripts and a paper edit?
- How long does it take to send content to whoever is editing the episode?
- How long will they take to put the episode together?
- When will the team have time to review the episode?
- How long will it take to carry out final edits?
- How long will it take to upload the podcast?
- How much lead time does the marketing lead need to develop content?
- How much notice do you need to give guests before the episode is released?
- Will you give them time to listen to the episode first?
- How much time will the team spend on marketing and promotions?
- How long will it take to process payments for guests or resources?
- What information do you need to review progress in meeting your objectives?

Section 3: Equipment



This section has been written on the assumption that the podcast producer will review your needs and provide equipment accordingly. For detailed information on equipment, see Section 3 of **Guide 1: Developing a podcast series**.

information so make sure you ask and allocate appropriate time in the outline!

Microphones

If recording in person, table-top microphones are better than lapel mics, as they are fixed and won't pick up noise when the guest fidgets. Your microphones should be neatly arranged on a table close to the speaker's mouth. Tuck any cables away so they don't distract or disrupt the person speaking. You may need a **pop cover**, something that softens the audio if the room is not adequately sound-proofed, and muffles pops and plosives when someone is talking, making the audio more pleasing to the ear!

For outside recordings, your microphone should ideally be battery powered so it is more mobile. You may need to request a **wind muff** - these act the same as a pop cover, and will improve sound quality by blocking wind as well as pops and plosives. You may require a boom arm or stand, to hold the microphone at a distance.

For remote recordings, ask your guests to use earphones with microphones or a headset. There are lots of options online if you need to provide one for them.

Specialist recorders

Zooms (R) are specialised recorders commonly used by podcasters, including the Our Sick Society team. These are more sophisticated than a standard microphone, recording high quality audio tracks (voices) via a handheld device. Zooms (R) can be used as computer audio interfaces, allowing you to record straight to your computer. They come in a range of models, which vary in cost and performance. Speak to your producer to see if these are available.

Software

If you choose to record remotely, we recommend using Zoom (S) because, as mentioned, it will give you separate audio tracks for each device on the call. However, Zoom audio will **always** be processed into an .mp3 file, so the quality will be low.



Complete **Task F** on p19 to prepare a list of equipment for your producer.

F: Equipment checklist

Complete the following checklist and hand to your producer.

In-person recordings	
Location	
Recording device	
Number of guests	<i>(i.e. number of microphones)</i>
If outdoors	Wind muff Boom arm / stand
If indoors	Pop cover Microphone stands Lapel mics
Transport / storage	

Virtual recordings	
Software	
Location	<i>(If room booking is required at King's)</i>
Number of guests	
Host	Pop cover Microphone Microphone stand
Guests	Headsets Microphone / Stand
Transport / storage	

Section 4: Pre-Production

Sourcing interviewees

Prioritise your list of guests and create a shortlist for your episode. If possible, arrange an initial phone conversation between each person and your producer or host. This could be tricky to arrange, but useful in a couple of ways: If you are confident they'll be a great guest, you could use this call to tell them more about the episode and invite them to take part outright. But if you want to sound them out first, to see how well they can talk about their work or experience, you could instead invite them to provide some "background information" for the episode you are developing before asking them to be interviewed on the show.

Paying for their time

For those you do invite to take part, make sure you discuss any speaking fees or expenses. Depending on available budget, you may need to discuss this before you confirm their participation, as they could be outside of your price range.

High-profile speakers will likely have set rates for their time, and experts by experience will need time and expenses covered. There are special considerations for paying those who receive income-related employment and support allowances. Here are some helpful resources to look at:

- [ESA and Getting Paid for Service User Involvement by Judy Scott](#)
- [Paying people who receive benefits - Co-production and involvement by SCIE](#)
- [Co-creating our payment policy: a personal reflection by Co-Production Collective](#)

These conversations may be difficult, and it may be more appropriate for a member of the production team to have this conversation on your behalf.

Agreeing a location

In-person recording

If it is safe to do so, you might conduct the interview in person. Secure an appropriate location for an audio interview – it may sound obvious, but open-plan offices, noisy cafés, or busy outside areas are not ideal! There may be spaces available across King's which you could use for recording.

Locations are not only functional, but can allow you to add colour and texture to your

episode. For example, if you are exploring the value of nature for good mental health, recording outside with birdsong or rustling leaves helps you make a point in a way which is not only effective but beautiful to listen to. There may be sounds you can record on location which will add to understanding in a way that words simply can't - things like traffic noise, sirens blaring, busy crowd noise, or machine beeps and whirrs. This audio can be used as background "music" or as transitions between segments of your episode.

A location can be used as an explicit part of your story. For example, if the host is travelling via train to an interview, they could record something like:



Host: I'm sitting on a train to County Durham, to the only place in the country where this project happens. I'm excited to meet Joe Bloggs, who set this organisation up, and to find out why the North East makes such a good location for this project.

Location is an important consideration when making your guest feel comfortable. You can record in their places of work, indoors, outdoors, private spaces, public spaces – each location will influence how the interviewee feels. Some locations may be triggering or uncomfortable for your guest, for example hospitals or clinical settings. This will of course affect the interview tone, and possibly content too.

You must be cautious about entering other people's homes or spaces which require special supervision, such as schools. Accessibility should also be a key consideration when selecting a location.

Speak to the production team about budget available for on-location recording

Remote recording

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that most people are now comfortable with video calling, and it may be better to record remotely. This can save both time and money. Pick a platform which both you and the guest are comfortable using - although we recommend **Zoom (S)** due to its recording functionality. It is very helpful to know which device they will use to join the recording. Remember, interviewees won't necessarily be using a computer, they may be using a phone or a tablet. Some may have accessibility needs or require special equipment to take part.

Find out early, so you can determine if additional preparation or tech support is needed. Bringing the guest into this process can build trust and instill a touch of confidence, particularly when their needs and preferences are catered for.



It is good practice to set up a test run to gauge the guest's comfort with the platform, as well as the audio and internet quality and equipment needs. Do this at least a week before the actual recording, to allow time for changes or delivery of equipment.

Prepping the host and guests

Your host will need to prepare some interview questions – not only the key questions, but follow-up ones to probe deeper, or steer discussion if the guest goes off-track.

Some guests may ask for questions in advance, but this runs the risk of them preparing or rehearsing answers, which will sound unnatural and stilted in the recording. Instead, send them a broad list of topics you'd like to cover, and remind them:

- What the wider episode will look like (length, structure, format)
- What you'll be looking to explore with them
- Why you wanted them specifically to take part
- Who else has been confirmed to take part
- What will happen after recording

This is a good time to ask them if they have any resources to plug (such as a paper or book) and details of any social media channels or websites to include in promotions.

Who should be at the recording?

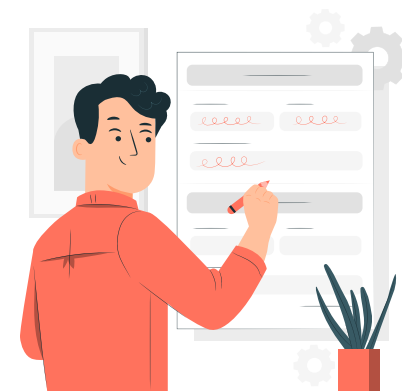
We recommend having at least two team members present during the recording - one as host and the other as a producer. It is very difficult to interview and record at the same time, and it can be distracting for the guest if the host is not 100% attentive.

Some topics are difficult to talk about, and guests may become distressed or need some support. Make sure that every guest is aware that they can have another person present when recording. If you are interviewing someone who is vulnerable, or under the age of 18, a parent, guardian or support person must always be present.

You should also think about who **shouldn't** be at the recording. When guests are being asked to discuss sensitive or difficult subjects, they may feel uncomfortable having unfamiliar, or too many, people, joining the recording. Where possible, limit numbers and have production support on hand but hidden (this is easier when virtual rather than face-to-face). If this is not possible, brief and reassure your guests ahead of time.

Consent and risk

Before releasing a podcast, you will need to obtain consent from your guests. A consent form provides permission for King's to use recorded audio both within the episode and in any marketing. It also provides clear instructions for the guest to restrict (i.e. anonymise) or withdraw consent. Here is some light-touch guidance on obtaining consent for different types of guests:



- **King's employees:** Consent is captured in their employment contract. However it is good practice to provide them with a written outline of how their data will be used and how to restrict or withdraw consent. Do this in an email, as you will need to file their acknowledgement of receiving this information somewhere safe.
- **External to King's:** you will need to send them a form which is approved by your department. Some may need to seek permission from their employer.
- **Under-18's and vulnerable adults:** you will need to seek permission from a parent or guardian.

[Click here for more information about consent forms.](#) Speak to your department lead for more information, or email csmh@kcl.ac.uk to view our consent forms.

Always carry out a risk assessment for each recording, regardless of the guest or location. This is important if you are interviewing someone who could be deemed vulnerable, or to whom you have a duty of care.



Complete **Tasks G and H** on page 24 to run through guest checklists.

G: Guest pre-confirmation checklist

Ensure you tick off all of these key items before confirming your guest:

	Podcast and episode information and links shared
	Recording window provided and availability confirmed
	Fees discussed, negotiated (if required) and agreed
	Consent form shared

H: Guest post-confirmation checklist

Ensure you tick off all of these key items after confirming your guest, but before recording takes place

	Recording date, time and location confirmed
	Consent form deadline confirmed
	(if virtual) Equipment test scheduled
	Accessibility requirements confirmed and planned for
	Travel booked (if required)
	Expenses forms shared
	Guest resources / communication details for promotion
	Episode information shared (Length, structure, format; Broad theme; Topics you want to discuss with them; Other guests)
	Post-production process shared

Section 5: Production

It's time to record! This bit of the process is known as production. The following advice applies whether you are recording in-person or remotely.

Managing the recordings

As discussed, we recommend having at least two of your team present during recording. One to act as host, and the other as producer. The latter will manage the technology and equipment, while host focuses all their attention on the guest.

Record your basic assets

You may be required to record separate assets for your episode. Ask your producer if you need to record:

- **Intros and outros:** They may have standard script or format for episode intros and outros. These may also be pre-recorded.
- **Trailer:** They may want you to record an episode trailer. A trailer should be nice and short - between 1 - 2 minutes - and should explain what the podcast is about and why people should listen.

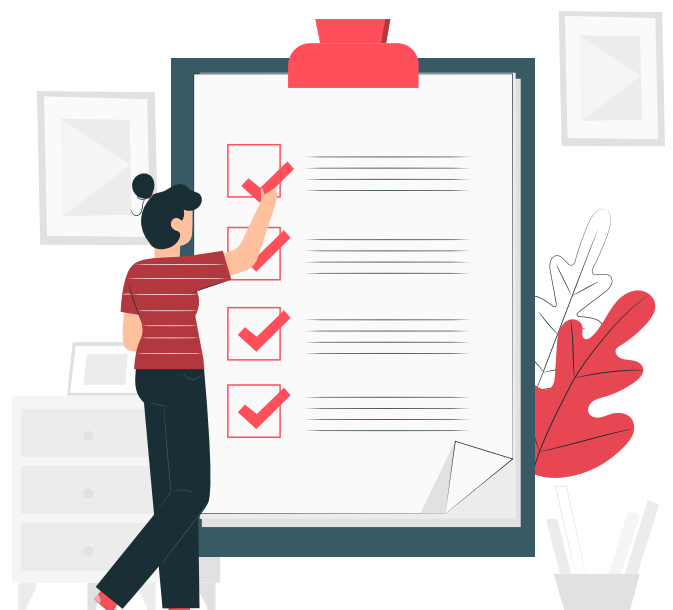
Initial checks

Consent reminder

Before you record, make sure you have the relevant consent forms signed! You could obtain these after the recording, however it is better to get them up front to save time in post-production. Run through the form to remind your guest about the recording process, and their rights to withdraw or restrict consent ahead of episode release.

Test equipment

Ask your guest to say something to check that your devices are recording properly and at the right levels. A good question for this is "tell me what you had for breakfast", which can also act as a bit of an icebreaker! Some voices can be difficult to listen to – they may be very soft, very loud or very high. Responses to this question help tweak the volume or microphone position to improve audio.



Recording requirements

Before you start recording, ask both your host and your guests to:

- Speak directly into the microphone but try not to touch it
- Remove noisy jewellery or items from the table / immediate area
- If referring to notes, lay them out on the table and try not to touch them. If there is no table, shuffle as far away from the microphone as possible
- If recording remotely, do not mute the microphone at any time. This “pauses” the audio track meaning that it will be out of sync with other tracks recorded during the call.



Complete **Task 1** on p34 for your pre-record checks.

Check-in with your guest

All guests are different, and their recording personas might surprise you. There are people who are very eloquent and engaging speakers, but clam up when a microphone is put in front of them. Many interviewees are nervous about taking part in a podcast - they may not have done it before, or they may not like the sound of their own voices or be worried about saying something inappropriate.

If you pick up on any of these things, it's important to reassure your interviewee before you start recording. Emphasise the fact that it will feel like being in a normal conversation, and that they have control over what is used in the final edit.

It's also very good practice to manage their expectations, particularly if you spend an hour interviewing someone but only end up using 30 seconds of their interview! Let them know how much content will likely be used. Most will understand that you are trying to tell a story, and that their answers will form only one part of that story.

Recording begins

After you hit record, continue informal conversation before launching into the questions. Encourage them to pause and think about responses, as silences are easily edited out post-production! If they don't like what they say, they can always try again.

Get your guest to introduce themselves, saying their name and one line of quick description as to who they are (this should also sum up what makes them relevant for

the podcast). Give them guidance on how much (or how little) information is needed. For example...

Guest: My name is Sarah Whoever, and I am Professor of Epidemiology at King's College London

...might be enough if your podcast is directed at a fairly informed or academic audience, but for lay listeners, you might need something more informative...

Guest: My name is Sarah Whoever, and I am a Professor of Epidemiology at King's College London, where I study how groups of people behave...

You might not use this in the final edit, and instead might re-record another introduction yourself, but if you don't have it, then you don't have the choice about whether to use it or not!

Asking questions

There are a few ways of asking questions, which will depend on the format you have chosen. Give your guest some guidance about how to answer questions as you go along, and how much of the question you want them to include in their response.

For example, if you wanted to know what your guest's favourite colour is, and plan to include both the host and the guest audio tracks, it could sound like:

Host: What is your favourite colour?

Guest: Blue

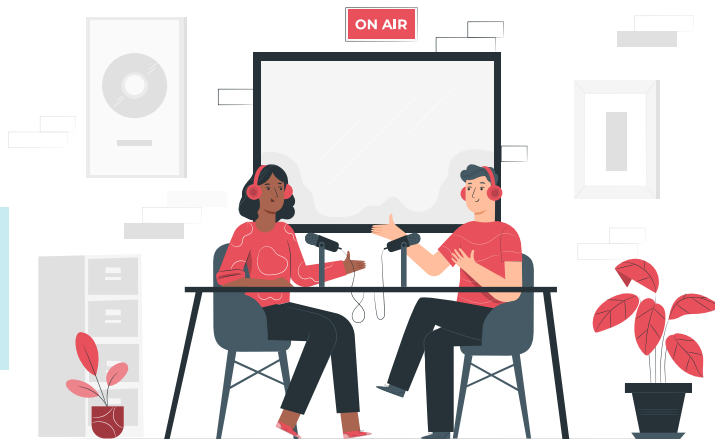
Or if you didn't want to include the host audio in the final edit, it might sound like:

Guest: My favourite colour is blue.

Or if you wanted the host to add some context or bridging later on it might sound like:

(Edited in) Host: I wanted to know more about my guest and their favourite things.

Guest: My favourite colour is blue.



Some guests may default into technical descriptions or very long sentences. Others might say the same thing two or three times in slightly different ways, which is great if you are looking for soundbites, not so great if you are recording a roundtable. Don't be afraid to ask people to say things again, or ask the question in a different way:

Host: What do you do for a living?

Guest: I am a Professor of Epidemiology, and specialise in strategies for statistical analyses of causal pathways, interactions, and trajectories of mental disorders.

Host: That's sounds very complicated! How would you explain that to someone without expertise in this field?

A good host will acknowledge responses and offer a reflection or comment before probing further or moving on to the next question. Impersonal responses like "Great" or "That's so interesting" can sound unprofessional to both the guest and the listener, and may disrupt the flow between segments.

Probing further

There are some questions or prompts you can use to probe further if you don't get what you want from initial answers. If you have experience in qualitative research, you'll already be familiar with some of these prompts:

- *You mentioned X, can you say a bit more about that?*
- *How did that make you feel?*
- *How would you explain that to (a specific group of people)?*
- *What would you say to people who have the opposite belief?*



As the guest is speaking, note down follow up questions. For example, if a guest is asked to describe depression, they might give a clinical description, whereas you wanted something that captures the lived experience. So you might follow-up and ask:

- *What does depression feel like?*

- *What's the difference between depression and feeling low?*

Have some questions up your sleeve for putting people on the spot and making them defend their views, particularly in episodes where you're debating a topic. For example:

- *What would you say to people who think that depression isn't a real illness, and that people should just pull themselves together?*

The key part here is not to challenge an idea directly! It's a gentler way to keep your guest on side whilst engaging them with an argument.

Keep the listener in mind

You should keep an ear out for technical descriptions or acronyms which listeners might not understand. Where possible, get your interviewee to explain these, otherwise you will need to add an explanation during the editing process, which could disrupt the flow of the conversation. For example, it could sound like:

Guest: I mostly use RCT in my research and...

Host: Sorry to interrupt, for listeners who don't know what an RCT is, can you tell us?

Guest: Yes of course, RCT stands for Randomised Control Trials, where participants are randomly assigned particular interventions, such as treatment methods, in order to evaluate its effectiveness. My most recent study used RCTs to explore...

Or if the host adds an explanation later it might sound like:

Guest: I mostly used RCT in my research...

(Edited in) Host: RCT is an acronym which stands for Randomised Control Trials. This is when participants are randomly assigned particular interventions, such as treatment methods, in order to evaluate effectiveness.

Guest: ...and recently explored the effects of a new treatment for this disorder.

If you get an answer which is confusing or not quite right, it's fine to ask interviewees if you can ask the question again and record a new answer. For example:

Host: That was great, but I wonder if you could be more explicit about X... I'll ask the question again, and we can record a new answer if that's okay?

Sometimes you'll go backwards and forwards, and the interviewee might want more information about what you are looking for them to say. The trick is to find a middle ground so that they give you what they want, but it's their view in their own words.

You may want the guest to revisit something said in background conversations or while setting up the recording, or even in a separate interview or article. The host could say:

Host: Do you remember when we spoke / you talked about how.... Can you say something about that now we're recording?

Managing interruptions

You are almost certainly going to have to deal with unexpected noises and interruptions which will interfere with the final episode.

If a helicopter flies overhead, a police car drives by with sirens blaring, or even if a remote connection has a bit of a wobble, you should pause the interview. Make it clear that it's because of the external interruption, not because the interviewee has done something wrong. The host could say:

Host: Hang on a second, we won't be able to use this bit because the helicopter is drowning you out, can we wait until it's passed, then record this question again?

In the event that the interruption is more significant, for example they are needed for childcare or a builder starts work next door, you may need to change locations or postpone the interview.

Special considerations

There are also some things to consider for different formats.

Roundtable

It's possible that one member of your panel dominates the conversation, and others are unable to make their points or contribute in the same way. Although you're recording on separate tracks, this will still be difficult to edit. This is when the host must draw on their chairing skills, by explicitly bringing people into discussion, just as you would if you were chairing a panel discussion. The host must keep track of who speaks and for how long, and ensure there is balance in content and representation.

People may have similar voices and be hard to differentiate easily. The host can help the listener by using people's names often, much more than you would in real life:

Host: Thank you Charlotte, can I ask Gemma, what do you think?

You can also remind the listener about people's roles

Host: Gemma, as a youth worker, what are your thoughts on this topic?

In-conversation with

The host should resist the temptation to say "yes" or "really". Although they can be edited out, they could be distracting or detract from your interviewee's answers. But don't fail to react at all! The host should give non-verbal encouragement for your interviewee to keep talking or elaborate – nodding, using facial expressions etc.

It might be that an interaction between the host and the guest will add depth and interest, for example if they respond with a gasp to something shocking, or laugh at something delightful or funny. This can add warmth and relatability to the episode.

What to do if an interview goes badly

If you have prepared properly, by researching your guest and outlining your questions in advance, it's unlikely that an interview will go badly. However, it can happen for several reasons:

Second thoughts

The guest may change their mind, not necessarily because of something the host has said. If they tell you they want to withdraw from the podcast - before, during or after the recording - you should respect their wishes. Tell them that you acknowledge and have no issue with their request, and that you will file their decision and destroy audio. Obviously, you should then delete the files and make a note on their consent form.

Emotional responses to questions

With some interviews, you may want to push guests a little, perhaps on issues where their views are controversial. However, you need to keep them onside so that they'll continue to engage and not feel alienated. If you have potentially contentious questions, think about asking them towards the end of the interview rather than launching with them. If your guest becomes aggrieved by the line of questioning, apologise and ask if you can rephrase and try again, or if they would rather move on.



The person you're interviewing may become upset, particularly if you are discussing a sensitive topic. An emotional contribution from an interviewee can be very powerful, but often comes at a cost. If someone becomes upset, you should always acknowledge their emotions, and ask if they want to take a break or stop the interview altogether. Let them know that they can ask for parts not to be included in the final edit.

Depending on the topic (and your judgement) you could mention omitted questions or responses in the episode, but do keep guest consent and well-being in mind.

It just wasn't right

Unfortunately, sometimes an interview may just not turn out how you expected. A guest may not give rich or long enough answers, or they aren't particularly engaging to listen to. It may sound harsh, but you should **always** keep the listener in mind! However, even the worst interviews can produce at least one interesting soundbite. You may need to think about switching up your format or adding some interesting context or links to keep both the guest and the listener happy with the final episode.

Ending the interview

Be mindful of the time – your guest may not have longer than the allocated slot! As the end of the interview draws near, the host can indicate how much time is left:

- *I only have a couple more questions to go now.*
- *Sadly, this is my final question!*

It's good practice at the end of an interview to ask whether there is anything the guest thinks you've missed, or anything they think it's important to add. This is often where magic happens in the form of unexpected insights or experiences.

When the interview is over, we recommend that you keep the recording going a while, during the debrief. There is often an audible sigh of relief when the host declares that they have reached the end! The guest relaxes, and a more casual conversation between them and the team may produce little gems for your episode. If this happens, do ask them if you can include this in the final episode.



When the REACH Project Young People's Advisory Group took over Our Sick Society, we had lots of these little gems in between the formal interviews. [See if you can hear any!](#)



Complete **Task J** on p34 for your end of recording checks.

Don't forget to thank your guests, and let them know next steps and timeframes.

Securing your audio

Many podcasts have collapsed at the post-production stage because an essential interview can't be found, or because a file has been corrupted. Whether remote or in-person, don't forget to save, label and back-up your audio files immediately after recording has finished. The production team may do this for you.



Complete **Task K** on p35 for checks when secure your audio.

Guest follow-up

Its good practice, and just good manners, to follow-up with your guest after the recording. Make sure you:

- Say thank you again!
- Give them a rough turnaround time for the episode
- Ask them for any external links or information they would like to be shared during promotion
- Point them to source of support if appropriate
- Handover to the podcast team for next steps

It may be better to send this email to each guest individually, even if multiple guests were recorded together. While we don't recommend explicitly asking the guest if there is anything they want cutting (this can affect your turnaround time if they ask for big changes or re-recording), by sending an individual email, you are giving them a private opportunity to flag anything they are uncomfortable with.

Finally, make sure you forward any promotional information to the production team.

Ensure you tick off all of these key items during each recording

I: Before you hit record

	(If using Zoom) Ensure there is enough space to save to computer
	Consent reminder
	Sound / equipment check
	"Noise maker" check - jewellery, papers etc.
	(If using Zoom) Ask them not to mute microphone at any time
	Host questions and notepad for prompts ready
	(If using Zoom) Select "Record to Computer"
	Record warning

J: Ending the interview and follow-up

	Anything to add / re-record?
	Thank guests
	Indicate anticipated release
	Request resources and/or promotion support (account handles/websites etc)
	Confirm who they can contact with questions
	Refer to support if required
	Promotional and complementary links and resources sent to production team

K: Secure audio

	Export files to computer
	Save in labelled folder
	Name files (be consistent - Episode #, Recording #, Guest = E1AJane)
	Save consent files using same naming convention (E1AJane_Consent)
	Back-up files on SharePoint
	Send audio to production team

Section 6: Post-Production



This section has been written on the assumption that you will only be providing a paper edit of your episode. For detailed information on audio editing, see Section 5 of **Guide 1: Developing a podcast series.**

After you have recorded all of your interviews, i.e. the raw material of your episode, it is now time to transcribe audio and prepare a paper edit for the production team.

Transcribing

Transcription is important for three reasons:

- It helps you to review and find content
- It makes the editing process much easier
- You can upload the transcription to your podcast website to improve accessibility and outreach of your episode.

There are lots of online solution for preparing these transcriptions, such as [Otter](#) or [Trint](#). Both are incredibly accurate and can even detect different voices, making the transcriptions very close to those made by a human. Both also offer a free allowance per month before premium pricing kick in. Depending on how much you need transcribed, and how regularly you will require the service, you might fall under the payment threshold but if not, it's most certainly a service worth paying for.

Ask the production team if they have a license you can use.

Whether you transcribe manually or with an online solution, you should be consistent with your format. Use consistent labelling for voices, time codes, and highlighting. In other words, make it easy for the editor to find what needs keeping or cutting!

Here are two example transcriptions, which we'll use throughout this section.

Note: example interview material is illustrative rather than real, but they have been informed by the [BEAT charity website](#), a leading eating disorders charity.

Example A: Interviewing an academic colleague

File Name Interview A – Jane		
Speaker	Time	Transcription
Interviewer	00.01	Can you tell me your name and title for the recording please
Jane	00.05	I'm Jane Smith, I'm a post-doc researcher at King's College London where I work on a study called IMPRINT
Interviewer	00.15	That's great, but can I ask you to do it again and this time tell me a bit about what IMPRINT is?
Jane	00.45	Oh gosh, I'm sorry, it's more difficult that you think
Interviewer	00.50	I know, seriously, don't worry, it happens to everyone, just give it another go, and it will get easier when we get into the actual interview
Jane	01.00	My name is Jane Smith, I'm a post doctoral researcher at King's College London where I research anorexia nervosa on a study called IMPRINT
Interviewer	01.15	Thanks Jane, Tell me about IMPRINT – what are you trying to find out?
Jane	01.20	IMPRINT is a study led by Professor Marjorie Simpson where look at how people with anorexia nervosa think about choosing clothes to buy, and whether those choices are tied to their perceptions about their bodies.
Interviewer	01.40	Is anorexia nervosa the same as what most people usually call anorexia? And for listeners who might not know what anorexia nervosa is, can you explain a bit about it?
Jane	01.50	Yes, most people would call it anorexia, but its full name is anorexia nervosa. In fact it's a serious mental illness where people maintain a low weight by limiting how much they eat and drink. They may develop "rules" around what they feel they can and cannot eat, as well as things like when and where they'll eat.
Interviewer	02.10	I think most people when associate anorexia with teenage girls?

Jane	02.15	Yes, but in fact anorexia can affect anyone of any age, gender, ethnicity or background. We are increasingly seeing more young men developing anorexia for example. And there are also many people for whom anorexia persists into middle age, even older age groups have anorexia. The longer anorexia goes on, the more difficult it is to treat.
Interviewer	02.35	So why is IMPRINT so important?
Jane	02.45	Anorexia nervosa often goes alongside body dysmorphia and
Interviewer	02.50	Sorry to interrupt, body dysmorphia, what is that exactly?
Jane	02.55	Body dysmorphia is when...the way someone sees themselves and their body is at odds with how others see them. In other words they have a distorted image of themselves, in this case, they think they are larger than they really are. We know this can lead to them checking their body regularly, or trying to avoid scales and mirrors. What we don't know is whether their body dysmorphia affects their choices when buying clothes. It may be that they buy baggy clothes to cover up their body, or it may be that they buy dark colours so as not to draw attention to themselves. And we think this might be important because it could be that getting people to think differently about which clothes they buy might be a helpful way to get them to think differently about their bodies, and help with their treatment.
Interviewer	03.30	A kind of fake it to make it approach?
Jane	03.35	Well, recovery from anorexia nervosa is going to take more than just changing a person's wardrobe, but this might be one thing that can work alongside other ways to help people's recovery. But we don't know at the moment, so that's what IMPRINT will be looking at.

Example B: Interviewing someone with lived experience of a mental health condition

File Name Interview B: Katie		
Speaker	Time	Transcription
Interviewer	00.01	Can you tell me your name please
Katie	00.03	My name is Katie

Interviewer	00.07	Thanks Katie, and as I explained, we are making a documentary about anorexia, can I ask you to tell me a little about your experiences?
Katie	00.13	Yeah, well, I've, erm, I mean, I well, I suffered from the age of 12 until I finally sought help at the age of 24. At that point, I was pretty desperate and hopeless. I thought that change would never ever be possible and therapy was such hard work. It took a long time but I eventually entered recovery and have never looked back. My life now is wonderful - and I never thought that possible.
Interviewer	00.30	And when you were in the depths of your anorexia, what was that like?
Katie	00.35	I thought about food and calories all the time. I tried to avoid foods containing lots of fat or carbohydrates and only had 'safe' foods which I felt were okay to eat.
Interviewer	00.45	That sounds like a nightmare
Katie	00.50	It was, I had a 'voice' in my head that shouted at me. It told me I was fat and worthless and that I was not allowed to eat because I did not deserve food. I thought I was in control of my eating but it got harder and harder to ignore the voice.
Interviewer	01.10	What effect did all of this have on you?
Katie	01.15	As I lost weight I began to feel tired and this made me more depressed. I couldn't think straight or concentrate at school. All I could think about was food because my brain and body was craving for it. I realise now I was suffering from the effects of starvation.

Using links

Now we have our content laid out, we can start to make sense of what the episode might look like. Even the most simple set of recordings need to be reviewed carefully - if you simply chopped audio from your contributors, or edited down one long "in conversation with" interview, there is unlikely to be a consistent narrative, and this makes it difficult for the audience to understand the story you are presenting.

Instead, your host should record context in between clips, also known as "bridges" or "links". These help to bring a coherence to the narrative, making everything flow better.

You could use links to signpost the listener to something *what* they are about to hear :

Host: I spoke to Doctor Medicine at the World Health Organisation and asked them about rates of mental illness in low and middle income countries...

Or *who* they are about to hear from:

Host: We've heard a lot from the clinicians and research scientists about the impact of Covid-19 on mental health, but now let's hear from Amanda, who has lived with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder for many years now, and whose experience of the pandemic has been far from easy...

You can use links to signal a change in direction.

Host: But what about our politicians? Why are they so silent on this subject? Matthew has a view on that...

Links also allow the presenter to insert information for context which maybe didn't come out well in the interviews:

Host: We know that anorexia nervosa is one of the most costly of all mental illnesses, with one of the highest mortality rates. But what work is being done to support those living with anorexia? Let's hear from a researcher with an interesting approach...

You can use links in lots of interesting and useful ways - to sum up content, ask questions to the audience, to inject a note of the personal, the list goes on. Links are a way of bringing colour and life to your story.

If you have favourite podcasts, particularly those using a documentary format, try listening to them while paying particular attention to the links. As with all aspects of podcasting, if you hear something that works well, adapt it for your own podcast.

Paper editing

After transcription, you need to carry out some sort of "paper edit". This is when the structure and content to be included in the final episode is outlined.

Sketch out the episode

Before you start, outline the rough structure of your episode. Let's say you want to have a 45 minute episode, split into three sections, including a standardised intro and outro (we'll look at this later in the section). This gives you roughly 40 minutes to play with,

which is good to keep in mind.

Identify your content

First, gather each of your recordings, transcripts and timings. Your team, and most importantly the person editing the episode together, should agree on an editing system. You might take each transcript and cross out words or sections, or just highlight parts to keep. You could also use notations or instructions to the editor. This is why transcripts are so helpful - you can review them, read them and mark up what feels important to include.

The format of your episode will affect how complicated this process will be. If you have recorded a panel discussion, you might simply need to highlight hesitations or repetitions to be taken out, or parts where links are needed to add context. If however you are using a documentary style format, your paper edit will be more complicated. You will need to go through each transcript and:

- Find soundbites which work on their own
- Find connections between sections and quotes
- Highlight bits to be removed or enhanced (e.g. increase volume)
- Identify links needed to join up sections

With this format, you will only be able to use a small amount of each interview, and they could end up in a different order to how it was recorded, or indeed mixed with parts of other interviews.

Let's say we recorded the above example interviews because we are making a documentary about hidden aspects of anorexia nervosa. We now need to take all those clips and spaces for links to create something which is close to a script. In the worked example below, we are working with the two example interviews, plus an already recorded Theme and Intro; and a file with section links recorded by the host.

As you piece the episode together, your material may take you in a different direction than originally planned - and that's okay! Refer back to the episode plan and your overarching objectives. What story did you want to tell? What were the key messages? If you can't fulfil those objectives you may need to re-edit or re-record content.

Example C: Worked example of a paper edit

File Name Episode 1 paper edit				
Episode timing	Source	Start time	End time	Notes
00:00 - 00:30	Theme & Intro	00:00	00:30	Full intro - no need to re-record
00:30 - 02:00	Episode 1 - Host links	00:00	01:30	<i>Yet to be recorded.</i> My name is Amanda, and welcome to this episode of our podcast series Innovation in Research. This week we will be exploring hidden aspects of anorexia nervosa...
02:00 - 03:14	Interview A: Jane	01:00	01:14	Start: My name is Jane.... End: ...on a study called IMPRINT
03:14 - 03:19	Episode 1 - Host links	01:45	01:50	<i>Yet to be recorded.</i> I asked Jane to explain...
03:19 - 03:37	Interview A: Jane	01:51	02:09	Start: Most people would call it anorexia, but its full name is... End: ...They may develop "rules" around what they feel they can and cannot eat, as well as things like when and where they'll eat.
03:37 - 04:07	Episode 1 - Host links	01:55	02:25	<i>Yet to be recorded.</i> Katie had anorexia for 12 years. She explains what this felt like...
04:07 - 04:16	Interview B: Katie	00:35	00:44	Start: I thought about food and calories all the time. I tried to avoid foods containing lots of fat or carbohydrates... End: ...and only had 'safe' foods which I felt were okay to eat.

04:16 - 04:38	Interview B: Katie	00:51	01:13	<p>Start: ...I had a 'voice' in my head that shouted at me. It told me I was fat and worthless and that I was not allowed to eat because I did not deserve food.</p> <p>End:...I thought I was in control of my eating but it got harder and harder to ignore the voice.</p>
04:38 - 05:08	Episode 1 - Host links	02:30	03:00	<p><i>Yet to be recorded.</i></p> <p>Dealing with those negative opinions about the body is a key part of the illness. Here's Jane again</p>
05:08 - 06: 12	Interview A: Jane	02:55	03:10	<p>Start: Body dysmorphia is when...</p> <p>End: ...they think they are larger than they really are.</p>

Review paper edit against your audio

Take time to listen back to selected audio. Sometimes there are words and sentences which look perfect on paper but in audio form are very difficult to edit. Cadence and intonation need to be considered - the person might be speaking quickly with run-on sentences, which is very hard to edit! You could end up with a nice, isolated clip or a jarring heavy-handed cut, which makes a difference between a great sounding podcast and one which takes you out of the flow as a listener. The production team may come back to you with suggested edits, changes or link requests, so be aware of next steps.

Support for go-live

The production team may request support in promoting the episode when it goes live:

- Sharing the episode on your social media channels or with your networks
- Asking guests to share with their contacts and networks
- Identifying groups or organisations who specialise in your episode theme or the work of your guests, including those based across King's

Clarify your responsibilities during post-production so you can plan accordingly.

L: Episode editing checklist:

Assets

	Trailer recorded and edited
	Intro recorded and edited
	Outro recorded and edited
	Music files created / downloaded and stored
	Episode audio files saved and collated

Process

	Transcriptions completed
	Paper edit prepared
	Paper edit reviewed and signed off
	Host links recorded
	First audio edit reviewed
	Host links re-recorded (if needed)
	Final changes made
	Final edit signed off

Section 7: Evaluating success

A successful episode is of course one with lots of listeners! However, an engaging podcast episode *about research* will also have its own definitions of success.

Meeting your objectives

The most obvious way of determining if your episode has been a success is whether you have met your own personal objectives. This is why it's important that these are SMART, and that you are able to log evidence which demonstrates how you have achieved them.

Also ask the team if the episode met their podcast objectives, and seek information on reach and impact if you think this will be helpful.

Research impact

A research podcast supports research impact – which is becoming increasingly important for higher education institutions to evidence. Each university is required to participate in a national research assessment exercise called the [Research Excellence Framework \(REF\)](#), which ultimately determines how much funding we receive from the government. Not only does the REF act as a helpful benchmarking tool, but it also helps us to provide evidenced accountability for public spending on research.

For the purposes of the REF, impact is defined as “an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia”.

In addition to the REF, there is also the [Knowledge Exchange Framework \(KEF\)](#) assessment, which measures the extent to which knowledge produced from research can be used for the benefit of the economy and society. This is a relatively new assessment but is a process which is being prioritised by King's alongside the REF, so it's good to get your head around these processes as early as you can!

The impact of research is usually assessed by its [Reach and its Significance](#), and so effective public engagement and marketing of a podcast is critical in boosting visibility of our work and achievements.

Your episode can directly contribute to increasing the impact your research as well as being a successful project in its own right. Perhaps it could even form part of a future [REF Impact Case Study!](#) [Speak to your REF representative for more information.](#)

Strengthening your skills

The ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health believes that research should not take place in a vacuum, and that effective, relevant and impactful research can only be developed through direct participation and co-production with non-academic contacts and those with lived experience. Public engagement activities such as podcasting or social media engagement can be an important step in building awareness of research and related engagement and collaboration opportunities, but relies on skills not traditionally prioritised in academia.

Academics are increasingly required to be savvy communicators, and to engage a wide range of audiences with their work (as we have seen with the increasing emphasis on the REF and KEF). By participating in a podcast, you are learning how to talk about your research in a different way, how to tie your research to current affairs, and how to demonstrate why your research can influence peoples' lives. You will also develop networking, presentation and facilitation skills. Success is not just for the podcast but can also be measured by the skills developed by the wider team! Make sure you bring the team together to review and discuss personal objectives, expectations, challenges and achievements throughout and at the end of the project.

Asking for feedback

Feedback from the production team can be invaluable if you want to deliver further public engagement activities in the future. Ask for feedback on:

- Whether your episode suitably met their brief
- If the guests were suitable, or if others should have been included
- How the episode story was put together and if it made sense
- Your skills as a host and if there are ways to improve

The team may also be able to tell you how many listens the episode had, and how it compares to others in the series.

Contributing to podcast evaluation

Feedback goes both ways! If you have any comments for the podcast team, if you felt as though you didn't have enough information about the podcast itself, or you didn't get enough support, or it proved to be too much work - these are all helpful for evaluation!

Good luck with your episode!

The Our Sick Society Team

This guide was developed by:

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- [Dr Sally Marlow](#) - Principal Investigator
- [Buddy Peace](#) - Producer
- Nicol Bergou - [Producer of the PhDeets podcast](#)

With support from the wider project team:

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- [Dr Gemma Knowles](#) - Episode lead
- Lavinia Black - Episode lead
- [Katie Lewis](#) - Production Support

Feedback

We hope you found this guide and the wider toolkit useful! If you would like to provide feedback or make content suggestions, please email csmh@kcl.ac.uk.

Further support

Email csmh@kcl.ac.uk to join the King's Podcast Producers Teams group.

Contact kern@kcl.ac.uk for more information about the King's Engaged Researcher Network.

[Visit the KERN website for other channels of support available across King's](#)

More in the series

- Creating a social science podcast
- Being interviewed for a podcast



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