

## Russian via Zoom

Missing the lively interaction and supported learning of our Russian Group during lockdown we decided, like many similar U3A groups, to get together by video-conferencing. At first we experimented with Skype but while it had a wide functionality, we found that it did not work smoothly for the whole group as there was intermittent distortion to the audio. Our next option was Zoom which some members of the group had already used both for U3A and for family meetings and found user-friendly. Although there have been some concerns in the media over the security of the system, the National U3A has not recommended against its use and has produced a security sheet to assist potential users.

The app is easy to use. Only one member of the group has to download it, arrange a meeting and send out invites by email with a link to join in at a set date and time. There was a problem for one user of an I-Phone who had to download the app before the link in the email would work, it was pretty much plain sailing for the rest of us, barring a few minor initial hiccoughs. Having trialled Zoom we decided to go ahead and upgrade from the basic version so that we could have unlimited time for our meetings. The basic version is free but only allows 40 minutes for meetings.

Our meetings are now running successfully on a fortnightly basis and all agree that Zoom works well for our purposes provided a standard etiquette is followed; that is speaking one at a time and taking it in turns to speak; easy to say but quite difficult in practice.

Being able to meet up and continue our sessions as before has proved a strong motivational force. It gives a sense of purpose and meaning to our studies and is particularly beneficial to those isolating alone, integrating them once again into a shared group atmosphere of learning and social intercourse.

Whether it be putting together simple Russian sentences, discussing points of grammar, reading and appreciating Russian texts, discussing aspects of Russian culture or simply chatting over a shared on-line coffee break, it seems that all will be done using Zoom for the foreseeable future.

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