

ESPE Summer School Online Report May 4th to May 7th 2021

The Summer School Steering Committee and the local organizer had planned and defined the logistics of the Summer School 2020 to be held at the Laura Ashley Hotel, The Belsfield, Lake Windermere, England, from September 7th to 9th. Unfortunately, in March 2020, the Summer School was cancelled due to the pandemic. This left the students, teaching faculty and ESPE feeling very disappointed. At that time, ESPE had planned to postpone the school to May 2021 and hold it face to face, just before the main ESPE meeting, which was also postponed. We were all sure that this would have happened, but the pandemic progressed during the whole of 2020. It became increasingly clear that the complexity of international travel, country-specific recommendations regarding quarantine and self-isolation made it impossible to predict what would happen in the near future. These factors needed to be taken into consideration for an international meeting such as Summer School and it was given priority for the safety of the students and faculty.

As 2020 progressed, it became clear that a face-to-face Summer School was not going to be feasible in 2021. The teaching faculty strongly felt that the school should still go ahead to avoid a cohort of trainees being disadvantaged for two consecutive years and not gaining access to this high-level training. The only option was to hold the Summer School online. This presented novel challenges as one of the successful Summer School characteristics has always been the face-to-face interactive nature of the educational activity, creating an informative and inspirational experience. The decision was to proceed, and ESPE Council and the ESPE Education and Training Committee gave their support to the faculty in this endeavour.

The Summer School Steering Committee (Carla Bizzarri, Cheri Deal, Raja Padidela, Gary Butler, Ram Weiss) re-designed the programme to optimise the online interaction and re-organized the flow of the content. The teaching faculty was composed of the members of the Steering Committee and six invited speakers (Paula Midgley, Neil Wright, Nadia Schoenmakers, Tom Kurzawinski, Maralyn Druce, Herman Müller, Senthil Senniappan).



Four sessions were delivered in four consecutive afternoons, with approximately five hours of continuous teaching daily. Each session followed the same format with three talks from the faculty (a report of a Controversial case to break the ice and introduce the session topic, followed by two lectures on the same topic), a coffee-break, and then case presentations to the whole group by the students. All the participants received a separate web link for each day of the school. There was an evaluation form to complete on the last day.

Both the faculty and the students were kindly and expertly assisted by the events manager (Kate Chick) and technical support (Luke Bennett). In preparation for the school, rehearsals were arranged for students and teachers to familiarise themselves with the use of the web platform. Small group teaching sessions (one tutor with five to six students) were undertaken using online breakout rooms one week before the school. The faculty met prior to the first session each day to discuss any operational issues. A WhatsApp group was created to rescue missing presentations at the last minute. Most lectures and case reports were punctuated by polling questions every 5-10 minutes. The faculty continually encouraged audience participation through lectures and case presentations and cameras were kept on at all times.

This was the second ESPE School to be held online and this experience has proved that it is possible. The feedback has suggested that the school was successful and delivered its objectives. Post-event comments from the trainees suggest that it met their educational needs and the interactive teaching was adequately preserved.

Is it plausible that an online School surpasses the long experienced educational interaction of the face-to-face Summer School? Absolutely not (this was the unanimous view of both students and faculty), but in the current situation the choice has been an online school or no school at all. On the other hand, Summer School success may represent the starting point for future ESPE online educational activities. Finally, the administrative support by the events manager was skilful and priceless; we all hope it can also be used in the future to ease the organizational workload of face-to-face schools.

We will be advertising shortly for a new Steering Committee member and encouraging those ESPE members with a passion for training and supporting the next generation of trainees to apply and join our faculty.

We are hoping the next Summer School will be held in Rome, Italy in September 2022. Details of this will be provided as soon as possible.

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