

From face-to-face, to screen-to-screen

Changing our revision course format during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

Postgraduate medical qualifications assess a broad curriculum, the initial component of which is typically a multiple-choice question (MCQ) exam.

For trainee anaesthetists in Kent, Surrey and Sussex (UK), we had previously organised and delivered a face-to-face, peer-to-peer exam revision course for the Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCoA) primary MCQ exam. Course faculty were anaesthetic trainees who had recently passed the exam. The course had been conceived in August 2018 and 4 successful courses had been held prior to the pandemic.

Due to the challenges of COVID-19 and the risks involved with organising gatherings, our revision course format was changed to an online format over the video conferencing platform, Zoom. This was in keeping with NHS and RCoA social distancing guidance and reflected the change of the RCoA exam to an online format.

Methods

The face-to-face course ran over 2 days, with 5 sessions per day. Each session consisted of 40 questions presented via PowerPoint under exam conditions. This was followed by an hour dedicated to faculty-facilitated discussion of the question answers.

Our online course was delivered via Zoom. It was delivered over 5 evening sessions using the same PowerPoint presentations from the face-to-face course. A faculty member used the screen-share feature on Zoom to share the PowerPoint presentations. Upon completion of the questions by candidates the video and audio link resumed and a facilitated debrief ensued in a virtual classroom.

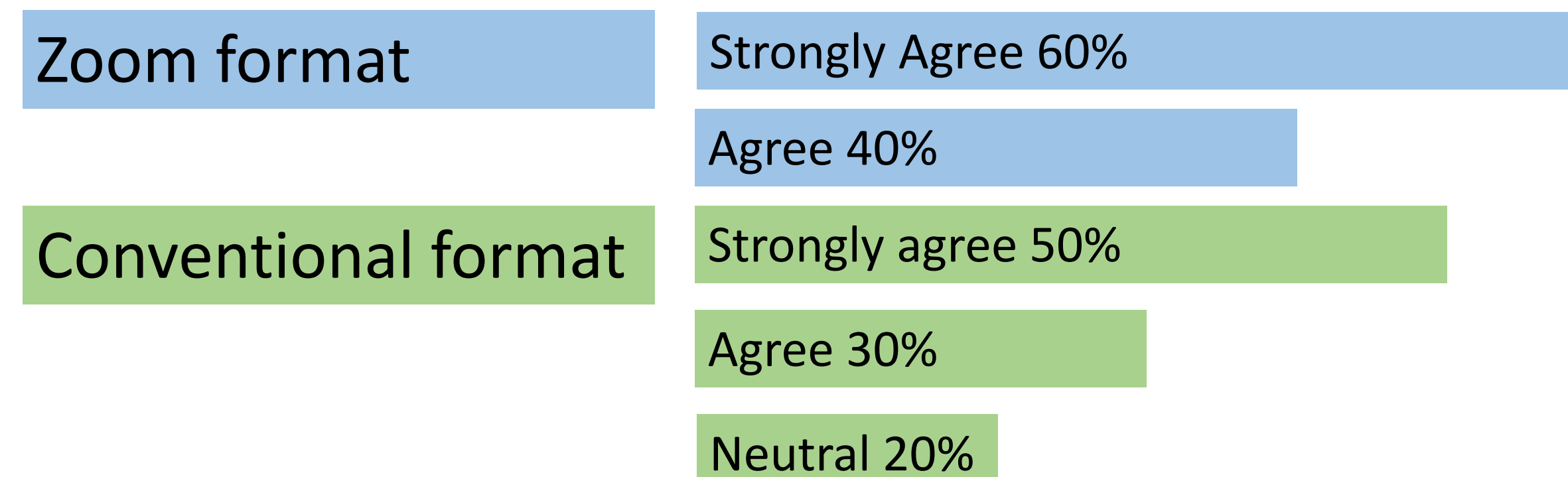
Feedback was collected via an online questionnaire after each course session. A Likert rating scale was used to gauge satisfaction and candidate perceived revision utility and relevance.

Results

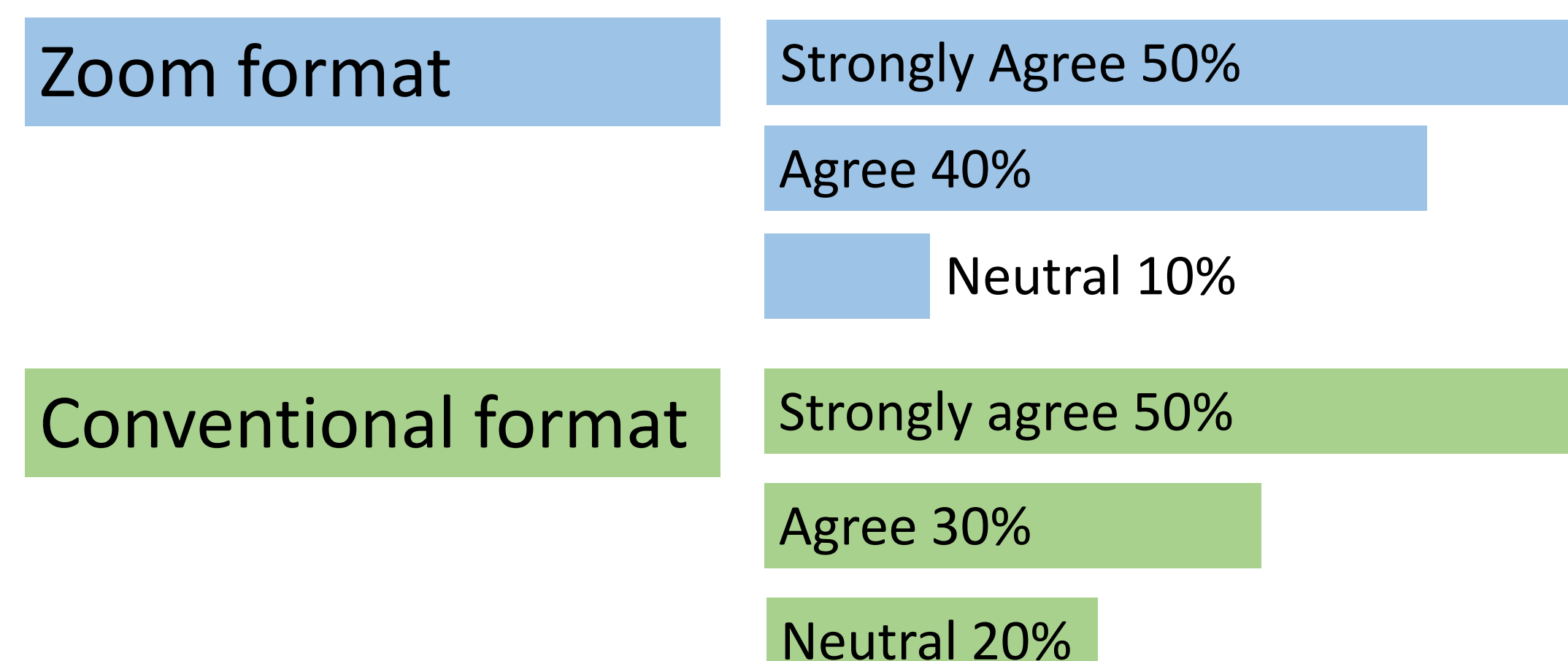
Nine candidates attended the Zoom format revision course in August 2020 prior to the RCoA Primary MCQ exam, a post-course feedback response rate of 66% (n = 6) was achieved. Feedback was compared with the 2 face-to-face courses (February 2020 and October 2019) that had occurred prior to the pandemic (n = 12). Faculty feedback was obtained during a debrief session conducted by the course director.

Candidate feedback

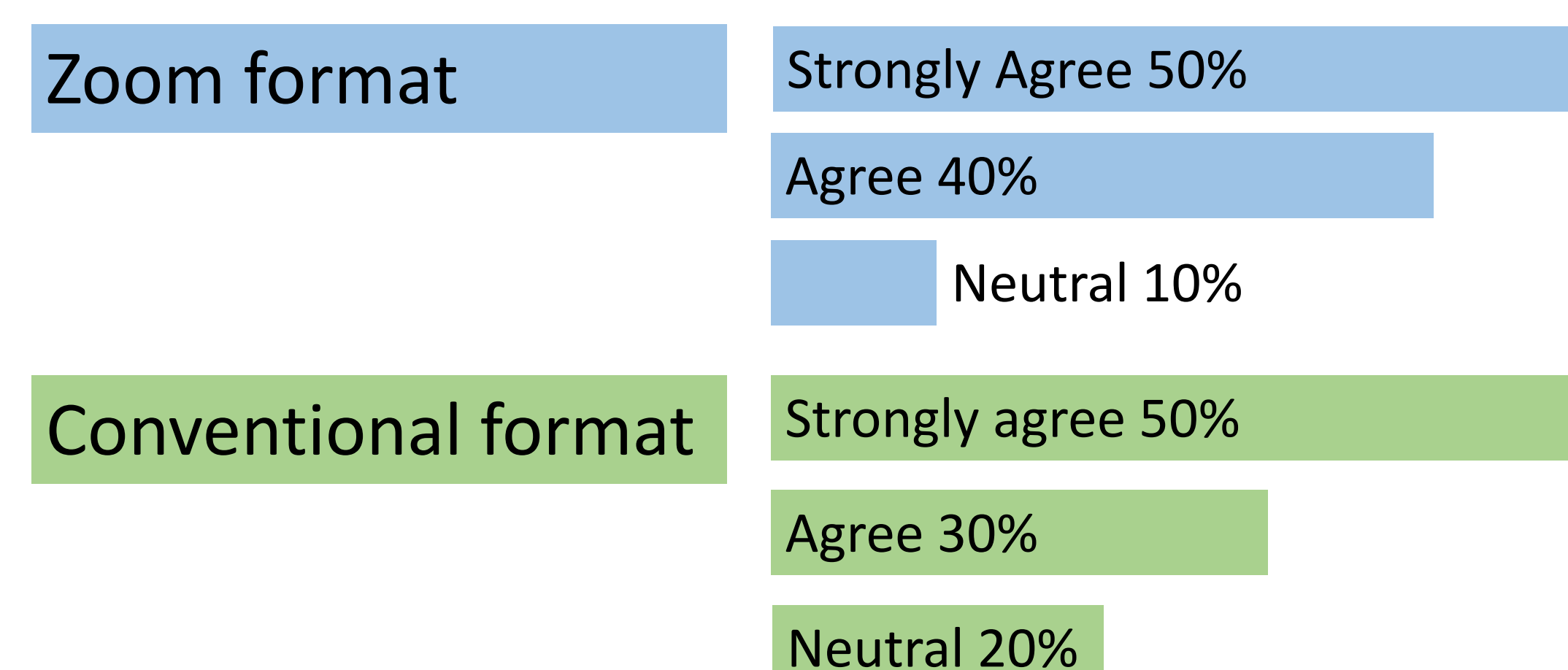
'The revision sessions assisted with my exam preparation'



'Group discussion of the questions and answers was an effective method of revision'



'Questions were reflective of the content I anticipate in the RCoA upcoming exam'



Faculty feedback

All (n = 4) faculty had taught on previous iterations of the course and reported that they found the Zoom format **conducive to teaching** and of **comparable efficacy to the face-to-face format**. Three faculty believed the Zoom format featured **decreased initial engagement** from candidates, however this resolved within the first 10 to 15 minutes. All faculty found it **easier to schedule the Zoom course** around their other work and life commitments.

Conclusions

The restrictions seen with the COVID-19 pandemic have placed unprecedented limitations on our education systems. Here, we were able to demonstrate the feasibility of using a virtual platform to deliver our course effectively. The online course demonstrated 2 clear advantages, it allowed the faculty the find a mutually convenient time to run their individual session and the format was aligned to the revised RCoA exam format. The challenge of maintaining the quality of peer-to-peer led teaching is a consideration irrespective of course format and we continue to revise course content to improve quality and fidelity.