



## Roundtables: reporting structures and champions

This Information Sheet can be used to complement *Development Team Exercise Sheet 2*.

Although the Roundtable needs to keep its independence, it must also have the links and communication to the institutional decision-making bodies to be effective. Establishing a link with the reporting structures and identifying a 'Champion' or 'champions' are key means of legitimising Roundtable activities. These strategies also increase incentive, credibility and direction. However, they can also be amongst the most difficult aspects to successfully organise.

### Reporting

The Roundtable does not function in isolation: its work and progress are strategic and potentially should have institutional impact. Therefore, the Roundtable must be able to progress its work and recommendations by feeding into the institutional hierarchy and by relating to the institutional strategy. In doing this, the Roundtable must be aware of the institutional decision-making bodies and decide:

- What role is the Roundtable itself going to take? It may act as an advisory or research group only to other groups/committees or it may undertake full project work itself. Normally it will be a combination of the two – progressing work as far as it can or researching and producing recommendations and then passing them on to the appropriate body.
- How it is going to fit into these structures? Even while maintaining independence the Roundtable must decide how far it is going to 'slot' into the institutional committee structure. It may decide it can work on relevant projects without establishing an official position, or it may parallel committees or report directly to one.

Once an appropriate position is identified, the co-chairs can establish official relations with another group if needed. Depending on the institution, this may have to go to agreed boards for approval and this will add to the overall time to set up the Roundtable's reporting structure.

#### Case studies

At **Institution A** there is no tradition of institution-wide collaboration. The focus has traditionally been within individual departments themselves. The Roundtable therefore is initially placed outwith the committee structure and focuses on doing small scale, local projects, but with institutional implications if built on. Thus, it is decided to establish the Roundtable and its reputation before making advances to a hierarchical group. This however, is considered as the Roundtable becomes more established in order that the ideas the Roundtable is developing are progressed fully.

*The Development Team at Institution B* approached an existing committee involved with monitoring learning resources. It was agreed that the Roundtable would provide a summary of its activities and any related policy recommendations on a regular basis to the committee. One of the co-chairs is a member of this committee and is available to answer questions about the Roundtable's activities at meetings. This committee is used as a vital link to raise awareness of the work and progress of the Roundtable.

**Institution C** had a 'Roundtable'-type group when its first Learning Centre was planned, which involved collaboration between all the stakeholders. This was developed into a full Roundtable by the two co-chairs as a stand-alone think tank focusing on all the issues around promoting and enabling learning technologies to develop in the curriculum. The role of Champion has subsequently shifted and it has therefore been decided to embed the Roundtable more fully into the institution's structure. This means that it reports to the Curriculum Panel (which the Champion chairs) whilst continuing to work very closely with all those involved in supporting ILT (Information and Learning Technology).

### **Champion**

The Champion is the individual or group who provide legitimacy by acting as the Roundtable patron and supporting its work. Often they will be a member of senior management or a senior management group. More dispersed forms of the Champion can also be used, however, for example, the co-chairs themselves acting as champion.

The Champion, as an individual, can either be a *small 'c' champion* or a *capital 'c' Champion*. This will depend on their level and type of involvement:

#### Capital C Champion

The Champion will be a senior manager e.g. a Vice Principal or Pro Vice Chancellor. They will often be the individual to whom the Development Team may have to go to initiate a Roundtable. This type of Champion is usually more removed from the day-to-day workings of the Roundtable and takes on the role of a guardian or sponsoring 'figurehead'. When considering this type of Champion, the co-chairs and/or Roundtable should address the following:

- The level of personal interest the Champion has in the use of technologies to improve teaching and learning. If they have a genuine interest their long-term commitment is more assured.
- The likelihood of the Champion becoming disengaged or distracted from the work of the Roundtable. For example, their management profile may be changed so that their direct institutional involvement or responsibility for learning technology-related areas is removed.
- The method/s they will use to keep the Champion informed of the progress of the Roundtable. The co-chairs need to consider what is practical for the Roundtable, and what the Champion is realistically going to have the time and inclination to do. Regular meetings between one or more of the co-chairs and the Champion could be arranged. Alternatively, or in addition, summary reports on progress may be appropriate or simply the circulation of the Roundtable minutes to the individual concerned.
- The desirability of the Champion actively participating in the Roundtable. This may compromise the openness of debate, as more junior or grassroots members may feel intimidated or inhibited. Alternatively, it may be welcomed as an opportunity for gaining contact with senior management.
- The possibility of the Champion attempting to steer or dominate the Roundtable and dictate its task areas. By setting the agenda and tasks of the group the Champion would seriously compromise the 'round' aspect of the Roundtable. The advice of the Champion should be valued by the Roundtable but the Champion should also be open to the Roundtable itself selecting areas for development.

**Case Studies**

The co-chairs at **Institution A** approached its Pro Vice Principal to be Champion of the Roundtable. The Champion, however, shortly had his remit changed and was moved from the area of learning technology. The co-chairs are now largely taking on champion roles themselves.

In **Institution B** one of the vice-principals had responsibility for support services such as the Library, the Information Technology Centre and the Centre for Learning and Teaching. He was therefore identified as the obvious candidate to act as Champion. Initially keen to take on the role, the vice-principal soon became focussed elsewhere due to his additional responsibility of a major estates project. This disengagement was felt to be having negative effects on the work of the Roundtable and the co-chairs began to act as champions themselves. This was helped by the academic co-chair being a member of the Senior and Corporate Management Teams.

Small c champions,

As well as, or instead of, a distinct Champion figure, the Roundtable may benefit from the co-chairs themselves taking on a champion role. This can be an alternative or a means of complementing the figurehead Champion. Co-chairs have the contacts and the knowledge to promote the Roundtable. Their joint approach means that they will span areas and levels of the institution where a Champion might have difficulties being positively accepted. They are a bridge across sectors and between grassroots and senior management.

ambassadors

In a further extension, members can be encouraged to act as *ambassadors* to their departments and other groups which they are involved with. This will help the two-way communication flow needed to legitimise, increase awareness and focus the Roundtable.

and ILT Champions

Within further education, use can be made of the existing National Learning Network's ILT (Information and Learning Technology) Champion programme where the champions act as mentors and enthusiasts to staff using learning technologies. These champions can be used as both Roundtable champions and as ambassadors depending on the local form they take.

**Case study**

The co-chairs at **Institution C** asked the new Vice Principal to take the role of Champion, but the focus of the Roundtable was not seen as a priority by him. His role as Champion was therefore not effective. Following some institutional restructuring and the long-term absence of the central co-chair, the Roundtable was itself reconstructed. An additional co-chair has joined the returning central co-chair. The previous second co-chair, the Director of Curriculum is now recognised as the Champion.

**HINT:**

In some circumstances it may be necessary to have an individual as a *Champion* due to the structure of the institution rather than their personal commitment or qualities. Where this situation occurs it can sometimes be balanced by the co-chairs taking on *champion* roles.