



## Roundtables: co-chairing and running effective Roundtables

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

The co-chairs are a group of 2-3 individuals who form a 'core team'. They co-ordinate and help to focus the work of the Roundtable and share the duties of chairing Roundtable meetings.

### ***Developing the Development Team***

It is likely at least in the first instance that the co-chairs of a Roundtable will be based on the Development Team. This is natural, as the Development Team has been made up of individuals with the enthusiasm and contacts to form the Roundtable. These, with basic group management skills and strategic outlook, are the key qualities needed in the Roundtable's co-chairs.

### ***Benefits of the co-chair system***

The co-chair system has benefits for the Roundtable as a whole, the institution generally and the co-chairs themselves. With more than one individual 'heading' the group, political knowledge and connections are amplified. Credibility is also extended with different chairs 'appealing' to different sectors and groups, for example, the ability for an academic to discuss issues with fellow academics and appreciate their perspective. Credibility is therefore geographically extended rather than being potentially localised. The co-chairs are a visual and actual confirmation that the Roundtable is a group balanced with both academic and support perspectives on learning technologies. Finally, and perhaps of most benefit, the co-chair system provides mutual support for the individuals acting as co-chairs.

Examples of co-chairs include:

#### **Case Studies: Development Teams/Co-chairs**

##### **Institution A:**

- Head of Computing Services
- Head of Centre for Learning and Teaching
- Lecturer

##### **Institution B:**

- Director for Centre for Learning & Teaching
- Learning Technology Advisor
- HoD and subsequently a Dean of Faculty

##### **Institution C:**

- HoD Supporting ILT
- Director of Curriculum

### ***Preliminary considerations***

To ensure a successful Roundtable, the more preplanning which can be undertaken by the co-chairs the better. The more work undertaken between meetings, the more 'smoothly' the Roundtable appears to work, for example strategic planning and organisation of task areas as well as general administration and meeting organisation. (Co-chairs should consider whether they have access to administrative support which may help with much of this.) Although this is a big commitment for the co-chairs it is beneficial in its contribution in keeping the Roundtable focussed – and thus the members engaged. It enables the more mundane bureaucracy to be kept out of Roundtable meetings. This will ensure that co-chair and members' time is used as fully and productively as possible.

For themselves, co-chairs should consider their individual readiness and commitment: they cannot expect members to be enthused and focussed if they are unfocussed and distracted. Realism is important when considering time commitment and work division. When thinking of becoming a co-chair, consideration should be given to:

#### **Time**

The co-chairs should consider how much time they can realistically devote to the Roundtable. This includes both for scheduled Roundtable meetings and for organisation and management outwith these meetings. As well as this, the co-chairs will need to balance their existing commitments with those of the Roundtable. For example, they will need to have the availability for meetings and to be able to plan their diaries accordingly. Finding times individually and convenient for all can be difficult, especially when co-chairs come from different domains.

#### **Case study**

At **Institution A** one of the co-chairs has her diary booked two months in advance. In some cases this might be indicative of an individual too busy to effectively act as a Roundtable chair. In this case, however, the member in question is considered key to the success of the Roundtable both strategically and personally. Meetings are therefore carefully planned well in advance.

#### **Length of office**

As well as time availability whilst serving as co-chairs, the overall length of office should also be considered:

- Are the co-chairs willing or able to take on this role indefinitely?
- Does the Roundtable wish to have individuals acting as co-chairs for specific time or task periods only?
- Do they wish to make one or more of the chairs cyclical to give fresh perspectives and direction?
- If so, how often do they wish to review the length of office?

## Division of work

There are various different ways in which the work of chairing and organising the Roundtable can be divided - notably by taking turns or by straight division of work. However work is divided, chairs should remember to agree a means of communication between meetings.

### Case studies

**Institution A:** all three co-chairs are involved in pre-meeting planning. The two support co-chairs alternate chairing meetings and writing notes/minutes.

**Institution B:** all three co-chairs are involved in pre-meeting planning. One support and the academic co-chair split the agenda for each meeting. The third co-chair acts in an 'administrative role', organising the Roundtable between meetings.

**Institution C:** the co-chairs meet to pre-plan meetings and alternate chairing meetings.

## Administration and organisation

The co-chairs themselves need to decide whether they will organise and support meetings themselves or ask someone else to do all or part of this. They should consider whether it is appropriate for one of the co-chairs to become an 'administrative co-chair' as in Institution C. Specifically, the co-chairs should consider:

**Recording:** It is important to ensure that adequate records of the meetings are taken in order that those members not able to attend, and the wider community, can see the working of the Roundtable and keep abreast of its progress. In some institutions secretarial support may be available. In others, it may be appropriate for a member of the Roundtable to take on this 'recording' role.

### Case study

In some case studies in the United States funds were made available for administrative and secretarial support of a Roundtable.

It is crucial that the notes or minutes from Roundtable meetings are made available as quickly as possible after the meeting. This will ensure that:

- They can be checked and approved by the attending members
- Members who did not attend can be kept informed
- Action points can be checked and progressed by those concerned
- The wider community can be kept informed

The co-chairs should consider the best means of circulating and disseminating Roundtable minutes and related papers and decide who is responsible for this. It may be appropriate to set up, and direct people to, a central depository available on a local Intranet or email public folders. This will help avoid email and paper overload.

### Case study

At **Institution B** Roundtable minutes and reports are available on an open website. The site also includes general information such as Working Group areas, membership and contact information.

**Organising meetings:** This is a time consuming task and again it may be necessary or appropriate for the co-chairs to consider undertaking this themselves. It includes checking:

- Member availability (and if not all members are available for meetings, that an appropriate balance is represented)
- Gathering, and circulation of, appropriate documents
- Room booking and hospitality
- Equipment booking, for example projectors for presentations

**Monitoring, chasing and herding:** As well as basic meeting organisation, the co-chairs will need to monitor and manage the task areas of the Roundtable working groups. They will also need to ensure that work is completed or progressed as necessary between and for meetings.

**REMEMBER:** The co-chair position is crucial and should not be forced upon an unwilling or preoccupied individual.

### ***Running effective meetings***

Part of the success of a Roundtable will depend on the chairing of the individual meetings. These need to be relevant and engaging to ensure continued member involvement. Participants need to feel that progress, on whatever level, is being made. Signs that this may not be the case can include:

- Presenteeism, where members attend meetings because they feel it is expected of them but do not contribute
- Where members do not attend meetings on a regular basis. This may be due to schedules but can also be because of 'better offers' elsewhere
- Members leaving the Roundtable, this can be for appropriate reasons such as changing remits of the individual or focus of the Roundtable. It can also be the ultimate sign of disengagement
- Dominance by certain members of the Roundtable

**REMEMBER:** Effective co-chairing and a clear, agreed vision, however, will proactively avoid many of these.

To facilitate successful Roundtables, the co-chairs should consider the following during meetings:

- Make meetings enjoyable – consider your members and provide suitable hospitality and environments for meetings
- Stay focussed, whilst being open to debate. Avoid being sidetracked from the key issues in question
- If the institution is multi-campus, consult members to the preferred location and possibly vary the meeting location

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- Ensure people are aware of each other's names and positions. This is particularly important when membership is in the process of change, is fluid or where a guest speaker has been invited to attend
- Remember that members will have different knowledge levels of the subjects being discussed. It is important to keep the meeting relevant for the 'techie' and 'non-techie' members. Those involved with IT may be tempted to use jargon which may exclude others. Encourage members to explain and inform as they discuss.
- If there is a noticeable information gap encourage members to discuss outwith the meeting or perhaps arrange for an information session. (A Roundtable member's lack of knowledge can be indicative of a wider lack of knowledge or awareness in the institution generally).
- As far as possible, ensure that work is evenly divided in the Roundtable. This may not always be feasible due to specific task areas changing and due to individual experience and remits. Be aware, however, that some people's involvement in working groups will be simply an extension of their job area. For others it may be outwith their immediate remit and therefore more of a commitment. This can cause tensions for an individual. It can, however, provide an opportunity for them to gain new experiences and contacts.

### ***Summary checklist of main co-chair responsibilities***

- Organise meetings, including setting agendas and arranging appropriate facilities, and hospitality
- Ensure meetings are adequately recorded and that resulting minutes and other relevant documents are made available as quickly as possible to the Roundtable and the wider community. Agree who will hold responsibility for this.
- Raise awareness of the Roundtable, its work and the possible applications of learning technology
- Liaise on a regular basis with other strategic and working groups within the institution
- Ensure the Roundtable is realistic and aligned with the institution's strategic policy
- Monitor:
  - membership balance, interaction and effectiveness
  - the working groups and ensure that their work and any recommendations are progressed within the institution
  - the need to refocus the Roundtable, deciding whether to return to these ***Information Sheets*** or ***Exercises*** if felt appropriate