



## **Roundtables: membership**

This Information Sheet can be used to complement *Development Team Exercise Sheet 3*.

One of the crucial elements in establishing a credible Roundtable is the membership of the group: who should and should not be on a Roundtable and the appropriate membership number for your institution.

### ***Who is going to select and monitor membership?***

Initially, the membership of the Roundtable will be selected by the Development Team. Long term, however, it is likely that the membership of the Roundtable will need to be developed and modified. Whilst the monitoring of the effectiveness of the membership will primarily be a duty of the co-chairs, it may at times be appropriate to open this more widely to the whole Roundtable. Members may approach co-chairs with suggestions for new members.

### ***Number***

When considering the number of members for a Roundtable it is worth considering the following:

- The long-term ideal number may be different from that when initially setting up a Roundtable. Membership might expand as it develops or shrink due to focus on particular tasks.
- Ensure there are enough members to be representative but be careful to avoid making the Roundtable unwieldy
- Membership can be made wider to ensure reasonable levels of meeting attendance. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that with this approach meetings and group communications do not become disjointed and that continuity is maintained.

### ***Balance***

It is essential to maintain balance on the Roundtable, in terms of:

- Academic and support staff. This will vary from institution to institution but may include for example:
  - IT Staff
  - Registry
  - Library
  - Full and part time academic staff
- Having student involvement, although this may be more practical and productive in specific working groups
- Different departments and 'political' groups
- Those with and without learning technology experience and knowledge

The Roundtable, in doing this, should represent your institutional community in order:

- To increase communication between sections and across boundaries
- That the Roundtable is working, and is seen to be working, for and with all and not just a 'clique'

### **Selecting members**

Selecting a group of members who are available, appropriate and can work well together and progress the ethos of the Roundtable can be a difficult task. Below are some factors you may wish to consider:

#### Senior staff vs. grassroots involvement

Personal qualities and institutional position are equally important factors in the membership of the Roundtable. By inviting the practitioners and enthusiasts a wider perspective and 'reverted cascading' is enabled with upward communication to senior levels of the institution. This will provide a clearer, realistic and more informed knowledge base on which to build the work of the Roundtable and progress effective uses of learning technologies. Often within institutions this may give more credibility to the work of the Roundtable than if it is perceived as 'another vehicle for senior management'.

Senior staff involvement does, however, obviously provide another form of credibility. By having senior staff involved, the Roundtable established embedded links with the institutional hierarchy which in turn creates credence amongst the Roundtable members and the wider community. A grassroots group on its own may be restricted if it is felt that senior management does not recognise it or its achievements. Management involvement indicates the Roundtable can *progress* its work and that it will not become isolated or a fringe concern. Dual credibility of members can be achieved if the general community, as well as the institutional hierarchy, respect management members involved in the Roundtable.

#### **Case study**

In **Institution B** the academic co-chair is not only a Dean of Faculty but has as part of his remit Teaching and Learning. He is also a generally known, respected and liked individual.

**HINT:** Experience and respect can be both departmental and institutional, grassroots practitioner and management political. Balance is essential in the membership composition of a Roundtable.

#### Enthusiasts and sceptics

The main body of a Roundtable may well be composed of enthusiasts. These are needed as they are the visionaries and often the instigators of new practice and uses of learning technologies. Caution, however, must be taken not to make the Roundtable appear an evangelical enthusiasts' clique. This could be very alienating to other members of the institutional community. Whilst sceptics who are going to 'poison the water' for the sake of it should obviously be avoided, it should also be remembered that sceptics are often disillusioned enthusiasts and idealists. They can often offer the caution and political knowledge to counteract possible naïve enthusiasm. They are also important in that they may be

representative of a sizeable portion of the institutional community. The Roundtable is about progression for everyone and not just the converted.

### Barriers and incentives

Individual readiness and ability to commit should be realistically considered by both those approaching new members and the members themselves. If an individual feels that they cannot commit to the full Roundtable they may be interested in joining a specific working group. Task areas, defined by the Roundtable, can act as 'hooks' to involve new and existing members. The Roundtable should be about what members as a group want to achieve. Identifying and achieving this will provide incentive, loyalty and commitment if achieved.

The Learning & Skills Council Teachers' Pay Initiative entitles staff to access higher pay if they have accumulated sufficient training credits. **Institution C** has decided to recognise the Roundtable under this scheme, perceiving membership as a teaching-staff development activity, and thus *rewarding* teaching staff members. Negotiations are ongoing to give similar rewards to support members of staff.

### Different voices – one vision

There will be instances where individuals need to be approached who perhaps have different perspectives and opinions to other members, or potential members, of the Roundtable. The Roundtable encourages the discovery of differences and, by acknowledging these, finds a shared, overarching vision and agreed task areas. Individuals who are willing to listen as well as speak are thus essential, as appreciation and acknowledgement of other perspectives are the stepping stones from which collaboration is based.

### Owned by all members

It is essential that every member of the Roundtable feels that they are a part-owner of the group and that their insights and opinions are as relevant as anyone else's. In any group of people there will always be some that are more dominant individuals than others. It is a responsibility of selecting the membership and later chairing meetings, that individual/s are not allowed to over-dominate the group or 'hijack' it for their own agendas. Members should also feel comfortable enough to be open and frank in their discussions.

### 'Same old faces'

One of the dangers of establishing a new group is that the 'same old faces' who are on other 'committees' or involved in other collaborative projects will be those willing and or appropriate to join the Roundtable. Dangers of having these people can include the fact that:

- Because they are among the willing they are already stretched
- It keeps the 'communication' and involvement circle closed thus possibly excluding and alienating others

Advantages can include:

- These people may well be used to working with each other and have established good links already
- If on other meeting groups they can provide communication links

- They are, perhaps, the 'same old faces' because they are effective, committed and reliable

Balance again here is important with the need for old and new faces together; those in the existing structures and those outwith.

#### **Case study**

**Institution D** is geographically spread over considerable distance and includes over twelve campuses. For this reason, it is hoped that the Roundtable will develop 'horizontal networking'. Thus, the Roundtable will select members from existing institutional committees ensuring that its work is relevant and disseminated to the entire institution regardless of geographical location.

#### **HINT:**

Consider making the 'old faces' co-chairs: this will build on their connections and experience whilst limiting the number you involve.

### ***Approaching***

Especially in the initial stages of establishing a Roundtable, briefing potential members is an important task of the Roundtable Development Team or co-chairs. As the Roundtable establishes a reputation within the institution it is hoped that what it is and can or cannot achieve will be known. When co-chairs approach potential members it is worth remembering the following:

- As well as approaching an individual directly it may be necessary in some instance for membership to be approved by their line manager
- Don't hype the Roundtable. Be realistic about its methods, approach and what it can achieve – otherwise you will potentially have a very disillusioned member of the group.
- Caution must be taken to ensure that the Roundtable is not perceived as another 'committee change fad'.

***General Information Sheet 1: Roundtables: a means of collaborative change*** is useful as an overview for potential members of what the Roundtable is and what it hopes to achieve.

### ***Terms of membership***

It is often unrealistic to expect people to commit indefinitely to the Roundtable. The period and level of commitment an individual can and wants to give should be discussed when approaching new members so that realistic expectations are established. Often members may 'float' in and out of the Roundtable as working areas make their involvement more or less relevant. Because membership can therefore be quite fluid, monitoring of the membership should be conducted. The co-chairs or the group generally may feel it appropriate to return to ***Development Team Exercise Sheet 3*** as a mechanism for focussing on this area.

### Case studies

**Institution B** started with a total membership of ten, including the three co-chairs. The general membership was made up of:

- The Librarian
- Site and Faculty Librarian
- Two lecturers
- The Marketing Officer
- HoD Information Technology Centre
- Management and Information Systems staff member

A year later the total membership numbered thirteen and a general membership developed to the following due to emerging needs and staff changes:

- The Librarian
- Site and Faculty Librarian
- Four lecturers
- Senior Registry Officer
- Two Computing Officers
- Management and Information Systems Manager

The initial membership at **Institution A** totalled thirteen, including the three co-chairs. The general membership included:

- A student union representative
- A leading administrator from a new second campus to be established following an institutional merger.

Membership is expanding to ensure meeting attendance, primarily by increasing academic staff membership.

**Institution C** had an initial membership of ten. This was expanded, primarily by including more academic/curriculum members of staff to enhance meeting attendance. A balance was also attempted between the three institutional sites. It was, however, largely decided to conduct meetings at the main campus as this was agreed to be the most convenient.

Meeting attendance continued to be an issue, with members stating interest in attending but being unavailable. A system was, therefore set up consisting of a 'core' and 'dynamic' membership. The core members would be expected to attend all meeting, whereas the dynamic membership would continue to be informed of the work of the Roundtable and would attend as and when it was appropriate. The dynamic membership would be key in bringing ideas and issues to the Roundtable to help progress or resolve.