

SRHE Newer Researchers' Conference, 06-07 December 2011
New Communities, spaces and places: inspiring futures for higher education
Celtic Manor, Newport, Wales

Guidance for chairing a session

As part of the commitment of the SRHE Newer Researchers' Conference to create a supportive, collegial and developmental environment for new researchers, we invite as many delegates as possible to act as Chair for sessions. Chairing is an excellent opportunity to develop presenting and networking skills. In order to help those who are chairing, we provide the following guidance in order to help clarify the chairing role and how you can successfully chair a session.

BACKGROUND

Each session that you will chair will last for 1 hour and 15 minutes in which there will be presentations from 2 or 3 (normally 3) speakers. The timetable in your delegate pack will confirm which room the session you are chairing is in. Breakout rooms for the individual sessions have also been allocated.

Each speaker is allowed 25 minutes for their presentation (including audience questions). It is highly recommended that speakers structure their allocated time as follows: 15 minutes for presenting, followed by 10 minutes for taking questions from the audience. Working to this structure will help you keep time and will enable the presenters to benefit from interaction and feedback from the audience..

The main role of the session chair is to ensure that sessions start on time, that presenters keep to their allotted time slot and to help manage the ensuing questions, answers and discussion to ensure that the session runs smoothly. The timing aspect is really important, as if it goes wrong, it can be difficult for presenters.

CHAIRING A SESSION

As Chair, we would be grateful if you could do the following:

Before the session

Read the abstracts of the presentations in your session before the session itself, so that you are familiar with the topics being presented. Where possible, presentations have been put together in order to bring together different perspectives on linked topics. You might like to mention any links you can see between the presentations when opening the session.

- Agree order and timings with presenter(s) at the outset and discuss/explain how they will be reminded of the time remaining. There will be countdown cards available in each room which are printed with '05 minutes' and 'STOP' for you to hold up to subtly remind speakers.

To open the presentations

- Begin each session on time. Clearly introduce yourself as the Chair of the session and welcome the audience. Briefly announce the name of presenters and their paper titles so that everyone knows that they are in the place they want to be before the session starts.
- When introducing the first speaker to start the session, as well as noting the topic, it is useful to let the audience know how the session will be structured – e.g. the presenter will speak for 15 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for questions and discussion (or variation as agreed).

- Please chair the timing of the sessions firmly – if a speaker over-runs their 15 minutes presentation time, they still have a maximum of 25 minutes including presentation and questions, so discussion time will need to be reduced accordingly. This ensures that all presenters get a fair and equal amount of time.

Managing the discussion time

- Thank the presenter for their presentation.
- Chair the discussion firmly. Try to start the Q&A discussion time by getting a show of hands for everyone who has a question. Ask each person to start their question by saying who they are and where they are from.
- Try to make sure everyone who wants a chance to speak has that opportunity – allowing for time. If there were still hands raised to ask questions and time is running out, take one more question and apologise to those who did not get to ask their question, emphasising that there should be time during refreshment breaks to pose their question to the presenter.
- Try to stick to one question per person before giving someone the opportunity to ask a supplementary or second question. This ensures that everyone gets a fair chance.
- Try to have a question ready to ask in case no one else is ready to start. Often this will get the discussion going if need be. If you do not have a specific question, try something along the lines of 'I would find it helpful if you could elaborate on/say a little more about X' (e.g. methodology, motivation for doing the research etc.)
- At the end of the session, ask the audience to join you in thanking the presenters for their presentations (with a round of applause if this has not already followed the presentation).

If you have any queries regarding the chairing process, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the conference organising team before or on the day – see the email addresses below. Remember, good timing is the key factor. And on the day, try to keep calm and enjoy it!

Many thanks for your assistance in helping the day to run smoothly. We hope that you will enjoy the opportunity to chair the sessions.

Patrick Baughan, Sian Lindsay & Saranne Weller (Conference Co-Chairs)

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