



COST Action 15221 Summary information for focus group participants

This document has been written for focus group participants. It has been designed to contextualise the focus group element of the data gathering associated with COST Action 15221 and to describe what will happen in the focus groups.

Context of the focus groups

COST Action 15221 addresses the challenge of creating synergy among the increasingly more specialised and centralised supports for four key higher education activities – research, writing, teaching and learning.

One of the objectives associated with the Action is to classify the elements that have typically led 'stellar' colleagues to success, effectiveness and productivity across the four areas of research, writing, teaching and learning. We identify these colleagues as key informants. We assert that if we can learn more about the intentions/purposes, processes, knowledge, skills and values of these key informants, from this we may be able to deduce new models of centralised supports. The Action's working groups and Management Committee (MC) agreed to use focus groups for data gathering. They also agreed that the focus groups would take place online, would be largely discipline specific, be conducted in English, be audio recorded, would demonstrate a gender balance, be made up of one representative from each of the Action's partner countries, have approximately six participants and that a protocol for the focus groups be drafted.

Purpose of the focus group

The purpose of the focus group is twofold:

1. to begin to identify with key informants the elements that have typically led them to success, effectiveness and productivity across the four areas of research, writing, teaching and learning.
2. to inform the design of the questionnaire for use with other key informants.

Research ethics

In line with good practice ethical approval is being sought and will be in place prior to the focus groups. That process will include approval of an information sheet and consent form which all focus group participants must have carefully read and agreed to prior to participating in the focus group.

Pre-focus group procedures

Colleagues will be invited to participate in the focus group by Action Management Committee members. In making the invitation, the MC member is seeking that the focus group participant is

- judged to meet, as closely as possible, the agreed criteria for 'stellar' colleagues
- motivated and willing to contribute to the data gathering process
- willing to sign the consent form associated with the data gathering

- sufficiently competent in English to actively contribute to the focus group
- sufficiently ICT literate to be able to manage to contribute to the focus group in an online environment.

Organizing the focus groups

All focus group participants will be provided with this short summary of the project which includes an overview of the focus group element. Participants initially 'agree in principle' to take part in the focus group and their name, discipline and email address are sent to the COST Action chair who, in consultation with the focus group facilitators, assigns the participants to groups.

Once participants have been assigned to groups, the relevant group facilitator will contact participants in order to provide more details about the project (information sheet, consent form and ground rules) and to agree the date and time for the focus group which must occur in either May or June 2018.

Consent

Following the agreement on the time and date of the focus group, the facilitator will seek formal consent from participants as per the requirements of the ethical approval. Signed consent forms must be returned to the facilitator and the COST Action chair prior to the focus group.

ICT checking

The facilitator will notify the participants of the technology that will be used for the focus group. Approximately a fortnight prior to the focus group the facilitator will check that participants understand how to engage with the technology by running a 5 min test at an agreed time.

Initial introductions

The facilitator will introduce participants to each other by email approximately a week before the scheduled focus group. Participants will be encouraged to share information between the group about their discipline, where they work, how they are connected with the project, etc. The tone of this introduction should be **very informal**, and chat like (indeed, a chat space could be used as an alternative to email). This is not an opportunity to share one's CV, rather it is a chance to get a sense of where participants are coming from more broadly.

Reminders

The facilitator will send a reminder to participants 3 days (or so) before the focus group giving them the link to the technology and reminding them of the date and time (and time zone).

Focus group procedures

The focus group will last 90 mins. Each focus group will also include 15 mins before the focus group proper starts, so that people can login and to ensure that the technology is working for everyone. Similarly, each focus group will allow for 15 mins at the end where any logistics or indeed follow up activity can be clarified.

Only the 90 mins of the focus group proper will be audio recorded.

Focus group phases

Phase 1 – welcome, checking-in and introduction

This phase occurs in the 15 mins prior to the focus group proper and will involve the facilitator checking in with everyone, welcoming and thanking them, asking them to introduce themselves, reminding participants of the purpose of the focus group in the context of the project, noting the timings for the focus group, and reminding participants of the ground rules for the focus group.

Phase 2 – Development – focus group work

The focus group will last for 90 mins. It will consider 5 questions:

1. What has been the single most important factor that has contributed to your success as a researcher, writer, teacher and learner?
2. What have you found most difficult in your career to date and how have you managed that challenge?
3. What habits or what about your disposition (professional demeanour) contributes most to your success?
4. What do you want to do next and what (besides more time and resources) would help you to achieve that goal?
5. What advice would you give to an early career colleague hoping to succeed as a researcher, writer, teacher and learner?

Phase 3 – Wrapping up

The wrapping up phase takes place after the 90 mins focus group and will last no more than 15 mins.

Immediately post the focus group the facilitator will turn off the recorder. The facilitator will thank the group for their participation and inform them of the next stages, namely:

- that the content of the focus group will be transcribed by participants of the September 2018 COST Action training school
- that those transcripts will be checked by a member of the COST Action Core Group
- that following that process, the transcripts will be sent to each member of the focus group for verification of accuracy and for any 'off the record' remarks to be removed
- that the transcripts will be adjusted based on feedback from participants and the finalised version sent to participants for their information
- that when participants get the finalised transcripts they will be reminded about the next phases in the project and how they can keep in touch or be kept informed of the research.

The facilitator will ask if there are any questions from participants. The facilitator will thank participants again and finish the focus group session.

COST Action 15221
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