

Group work 4: Making discussions work

Introduction

Productive and satisfying discussions do not happen by chance. They need preparation and careful facilitation. Here are some useful tips:

- **Assign the role of chair.** This is central to success and it is good to rotate this role so that all group members have a chance to try it out. The chair should be supported by a note maker who can summarise when needed. The chair needs to listen very well and guide the conversation so that it stays on task and enables everyone to speak. They should be ready to use prompts to guide the group when needed. They should also be ready to politely challenge those who dominate and draw out those who need more thinking time before speaking.
- **Make sure your purpose is clear.** Ensure everyone knows what you want to get out of the discussion. Perhaps you need to make a decision or to assign roles. Perhaps you need to evaluate and analyse findings. Be clear how participants should prepare and what the outcome or benefit is going to be.
- **Decide on timing.** Be clear how long you are allocating to the discussion. Be strict on timings because some group members will have other commitments directly afterwards.
- **Work out turn taking** and methods to ensure everyone will get a chance to speak. Agree etiquette around this, e.g. use of hand-raisin or waiting to be invited by the chair.
- **Be aware of cultural differences** about how discussions should work. Share your understanding of what a discussion is and what it is for. This could be done in advance.
- **Commit to engagement and participation.** Agree etiquette for video use. Being able to see people helps people to connect, so if possible, switch the video on. Make contributions to the group and be present for the others.
- **Be an active listener.** Focus on what others are saying and do not be distracted by your phone or other things on your screen.
- **Ask questions** if there is something you don't understand.
- **Choose your language** carefully and speak clearly and politely, as you would in a professional context.