

Special Interest Groups

Purpose/aims:

The purpose of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) is to provide a forum for members with shared interests in specific areas of HE policy or practice. Members enhance and develop their understanding of a specialist area by partaking in group based discussion and information exchange.

Activity:

The way in which SIGS go about sharing information or exploring a specific area of policy or practice is defined by the group itself, although it may include the following activities:

- Web based discussion about issues that affect the area of interest (e.g. new legislation, changes to existing practice, structural adjustments affecting the sector)
- Investigation or research into specific topics within the area of interest, and dissemination of findings through:
 - Good Practice Guides
 - Conference sessions
 - Day Seminars
 - online resources (e.g. a blog or wiki)
 - Other documents/publications (e.g. short 'how to' guides)
- Supporting colleagues with questions and queries relating to their field of work
- Inviting relevant bodies/representatives to present to members and/or answer questions put forward by members
- Communication and liaison with key bodies that affect the sector

Structure

Each SIG will have its own convenor, in addition to a small working team that sets the direction and agenda of the group's activity. There is no minimum or maximum amount required for a SIG team; SIGS are encouraged to make their own decisions about the structure and allocation of responsibilities. SIG convenors will ideally have a good level of experience in their relevant field/area of interest, and will have clear aims that they hope the SIG to pursue.

Membership and SIG promotion

The aims and objectives of each SIG (defined at its outset and amended if necessary on a continual basis) will clearly specify who the group has been set-up for, and what members can expect from their membership of the group. By clearly defining the purpose and aims of the group, new members will be given a good idea of the level of input that is expected from them.

Setting up a SIG and ensuring adequate levels of activity

It's important that each SIG has clear aims and objectives and maintains a healthy level of activity. This ensures that current and prospective members of a SIG are able to benefit from signing up to the group.

In order to ensure that this takes place a number structures are in place to ensure that each SIG runs effectively.

Before a SIG is set-up it needs to be formally considered and approved by the SIG Coordinator in conjunction with MCC, (or its equivalent under a new constitution) and the AUA's Executive Director. This process is intended to support and encourage convenors to formulate a clear direction and agenda for each SIG.

- **SIG Coordinator**

Once a SIG has been set-up, regular support can be expected from the SIG Coordinator, who will ensure that minimum standards of activity take place.

Each year SIGS Convenors will be asked to produce a short end of year report that outlines achievements, but also sets the agenda for the coming year.

- **SIG Convenors Group**

In addition to this, each SIG Convenor will be able to share ideas and advice with other convenors, by communicating through group email lists and meetings if necessary. It is also hoped that SIG Convenors will use their individual working groups to formulate aims and objectives for their group.

Support and Resources offered to SIGs

There are a number of support mechanisms in place to ensure SIGs function effectively. This includes the following:

- Ability to cover expenses of a twice yearly SIG convenors' meeting, should it be required
- Organisation of events/day seminars by AUA Events
- Assistance with online resources, including setting up of mail lists and blogs/discussion forums
- Opportunities for promotion of SIGS activity/events online and in regular publications such as *Newslink*
- Other expenses that arise from SIG activity, (to be considered on a case by case basis)