Chairing/Mentoring during the Emerging Researchers' Conference (ERC)

This document contains an overview of how to chair a session during the ERC. It is based on the suggestions and experience of an emerging researcher who chaired/mentored ERC sessions. There are some useful links at the end of this document.

What are the roles/ tasks of an ERC chairperson?

- Creating a productive, pleasant and motivating time for presenters, co-chairs and attendants
- Upholding the developmental and supportive ethos of the ERC

How can you prepare yourself in advance?

- Read the abstracts available via your Conftool user account. Click on "Information for Session Chairs and Moderators"
- Sum up the abstracts (e.g. what is interesting, special, …).
- Think about one or two questions.
- Think about the introduction in general and for each presentation.
- Think about the coherence of the (sometimes diverse) presentations.
- If possible, Google® some information about the presenters (institute, research group and research interests).
- Consider the pronunciation of the names (perhaps ask authors themselves on the day).
- **Note:** Do check that the session room has not changed (there will be a printed programme update issued in the Conference Bag and further announcements in the Conference App) and that you know where it is.

Play the session in your mind and think about worst cases and solutions for these. This will help you to stay cool (even when something else happens). You can find an overview on troubles and ideas how to solve them in the article from Hardavella et al. (2014).

What should you take with you?

- Your notes and time cards (usually provided, but you can take your own e.g. "5 mins left" etc)
- (Stop) Watch.

What should you do (in the break) before the session starts?

Be the first in the room to

- Check that the equipment (computer, projector) is in place. If there is a problem, please contact one of the volunteers from the Local Organizing Committee or the EERA Desk.
- Upload the presentations (if needed).
- Choose a place that allows you to make eye contact with the presenter.
- If needed, rearrange chairs and tables to make sure that the distance between the presenter and the audience is appropriate; you can also invite the audience to come closer.
- Please verify that all the presenters are present. Introduce yourself to the presenters (if needed ask for the pronunciation of their names, ask for handouts) and explain the schedule and rules to the presenters (e.g. how much time they have to speak, how much

time for questions, and how you will let them know about the time left. **Please be firm when reminding speakers to stop.**
- **Note:** If unfortunately some presenters fail to turn up to the session, please agree with the audience and other speakers how the extra time should be used (it may involve an earlier finish, a break, or allowing longer time for each speaker). Try to ensure that eah speaker is given the same amount of time for the presentation and discussion of their paper.

How to manage the session?
Introducing the session
- Welcome the audience and introduce yourself.
- Let the audience know what the session is about. Tell attendees what to expect, e.g., "This afternoon we have three speakers presenting on.... Each speaker will have approximately ... minutes to present, followed by a ... minute Q&A session."
- Please ask people to turn off mobile phones.
- Remind the audience to make notes of the questions they have and that this is a safe and supportive environment to help emerging researchers develop their papers.
- **Note:** Do keep the introduction to the session and the authors short as this takes up some of their presentation time. Introductions can be done briefly while the presenters are opening their presentations from the desktop.

During the presentation
- Introduce the speaker by the full name, the topic of their paper and a brief background.
- Time session concisely; show the speaker the previously agreed card cues regarding time remaining. **Please be firm when reminding speakers to stop.**
- Deal with any technical interruptions if they occur during the presentation.
- Thank the speaker and applause.

Facilitating the discussion, managing questions and answers
- It is preferable that questions and discussion take place immediately after each presentation since the conference runs parallel sessions and some delegates will wish to change rooms between presentations.
- Leave a silence, if there are no questions first –it often takes time to think.
- Resist the temptation to ask the first question yourself and encourage the audience.
- Repeat or rephrase questions as needed.
- Manage the questions, choosing which people to ask questions (try to avoid allowing the same people to repeatedly ask questions and defer the inappropriate/ aggravating ones).
- Keep track of time, and announce the end of the period in advance (e.g. "We have time for two more questions", "Last question.").
- Encourage those who wish to engage the speakers in lengthy discussion to do so over coffee.
- If there are no questions, then ask one or two questions yourself.
- Thank the presenter and initiate a second round of applause.
- Announce the next speaker.

Wrapping up the session

- Present the coherence of the session or restate the main message of each presentation.
- Extend thanks to the presenters at the end, make any announcements (if required) and remind people of the next events in the programme.
- End on a positive note (e.g."Enjoy your lunch" or "I hope to see many of you at …tonight.").
- **Note:** Please complete the Session Return Slip (to be found and left in the red folder in the room). We only ask for information about the presentations that were presented and the number of participants. We would very much appreciate your help in gathering this vital information

After the session

- Leave the Session Evaluation Form in the folder in the room.
- Make sure that any equipment is safely stored to prevent any accidents.
- Time permitting, please check the room and hand any lost property to the EERA Help Desk.
- If needed, rearrange the room back to its original layout.

References and useful Links:

Bateman, Alex; Philip E. Bourne. 2009. *Ten Simple Rules for Chairing a Scientific Session.* PLoS Comput Biol. 2009 Sep; 5(9): e1000517, available at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2738972/, [01/01/23].

Brotherhood, Angelina; Alexandra Morales, Aniek van Herwaarden. 2017. *How to chair a scientific conference session (and not look like a fool!)* posted by EUSPR Early Careers Forum available at **http://euspr.hypotheses.org/675;** [01/01/23].

Doumont, Jean-luc (ed.). 2014. English Communication for Scientists. Cambridge, MA: NPG Education, chapter 5.2, available at https://www.nature.com/scitable/topicpage/chairing-sessions-13908566, [01/01/23].

Hardavella, Georgia; Neil J Saad; Daan Caudri; Simon Skoczynski, Anders Bjerg. 2014. *Doing Science*, Breathe Jun 2014, 10 (2) 165-168, available at http://breathe.ersjournals.com/content/10/2/165, [01/01/23].