

Notes for Symposium Chairs

Thank you for agreeing to be a Symposium Chair. Chairs provide an important role in facilitating the scientific element of BECERA Conferences and they are selected because of their acknowledged scholarship and standing in the academic community. The function of the Chair is to support the contributors and to facilitate their communication both with the audience and between each other.

The following suggestions are to help maximise opportunities for as many people as possible to communicate effectively about their research. Inevitably, some parallel concurrent symposia will be running. In some sessions there will be more participants than others as symposia are offered on the basis of free choice to delegates.

The Preparatory Meeting

The Conference Scientific Committee will have collated individual paper proposals into symposium using the abstracts submitted during the 'Call for Papers'. We will inform you of the presenters in your symposium, their abstracts, their institution and their emails. We would recommend that the Chair and all the symposium contributors have contact by email, discuss abstracts, look for possible links and if needed exchange power points or full papers.

It's good to have a preparatory meeting or discussion before the session. Many contributors are fairly tense immediately before their sessions and when initial meetings are left until the last minute they are less open to suggestions and less likely to make adaptations.

Agree on a timetable: how long each is to have, the order of appearance and whether questions and discussion will be allowed at the end of each paper or at the end of the session. Symposia presentation time is very short and really their allotted 20 minutes are to communicate the essence of a paper. Further communication can often take place after the session with those who express an interest. Agree on the time signal to be used notifying contributors that they have 2 minutes remaining and confirm that, to be fair to all, agreed times will be strictly enforced.

Discuss possible strategies to save time and remain within the time limit. Suggest that they might time themselves doing a dry run. Suggest that they try not to just read from a text and that they should not just speak quicker in an attempt to get in all they wish to say. Recommend that, if necessary, they restructure their text, focus on essentials, see what they can cut and that they focus on key words on overheads to support those in their audience who are not as fluent in the language as they are. Suggest they have an emergency procedure prepared to curtail their talk at the two minute warning if they are over running e.g. mark paragraphs on their paper that they could skip or prepare a conclusion that captures the essence of what they wish to say.

Check that everyone feels comfortable and talk about it.

During the Session

Begin on time and be as brief in your introduction as you can. Start with the theme of the symposium and its number. Explain the format you have agreed regarding the timing of presentations, questions and discussion. Inform the audience of the order (it might be different to the programme) and introduce the first speaker paraphrasing the title. Write down before your symposium the time each presenter: (a) starts, (b) has 2 minutes left and (c) must finish. Keep a close eye on your watch.

Be attentive to the content, take short notes and intervene briefly if you think something needs clarification. During the discussion, try not to dominate but facilitate. Be ready to formulate a question or remark that might stimulate debate particularly to break the initial ice. Invite questions or

comment. Make sure questions are understood by both audience and respondent. Don't let one person dominate the debate.

Requests from the audience for copies of papers are the responsibility of the presenters. If they have not brought sufficient then participants who want a copy of their paper should make individual arrangements with each contributor, such as leaving their name and address on a sheet and receiving an email from the contributor after the Conference.

Thank all the contributors and participants at the end and invite applause.

After the Symposium

Have a personal word with each contributor but make sure that members of the audience have access first.

Give each of the presenters private, positive, constructive but critical feedback on content and on presentation and communication skills (pace, quality of power point, what to emphasise in them etc.). This can be left until later in the conference, if necessary. Ask them how they felt it went and respond.

Make sure the room is left tidy and ready for the next session.

Enjoy chairing your symposium session and thank you for facilitating the work of the Conference. We would value your evaluative feedback after the Conference, so that we can continue to respond to delegates' needs.

