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# 'The Gatherings':

## report from the SCONUL Advisory Committee on Staffing (ACoS) on the deputies/second-tier managers networking groups

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Over twelve years ago the first of the 'deputies' groups was formed. At first its members were exclusively from the pre-1992 universities and then some members joined from the post-1992 universities. The group meets once a year and is known to its members as 'The Gathering'. This was chosen because it needs to be referred to as something and it is not a conference but rather a networking event for staff in similar posts. Much folklore grew up about this group. It was said to be exclusive, mysterious and a clique which was not hospitable to new members! At the same time, there was much talk of what an effective opportunity it was for those involved – so why couldn't everybody go along?

During the last year the 'Gathering' has been 'cloned', with a little help from the Advisory Committee on Staffing, so there are now three such groups involving staff from 68 institutions including pre-1992 and post-1992 universities and colleges. Participants were recruited through the usual SCONUL e-mail messages.

So let me try to dispel some of the folklore and tell you a little more about these groups. Each group is made up of staff who are deputies or, since the title is not used in all institutions, members of the senior management team in their libraries. They are in posts in the second tier below the head of service. Groups meet once a year – this year in June, September and November respectively. Meetings are from Friday night to Sunday lunch-time and are held in different parts of the country. Group members organise the venue and the programme which is entirely self-generated with one exception. If a member of a group has recently been promoted to a head of service post, they are often invited back to the next meeting to talk

about the 'view from the top' as opposed to the view from the deputy's position.

The aim of the groups is to provide a network of peers forming a confidential forum in which to brainstorm and or discuss ideas, developments and problems and to share good practice. Sessions at the meetings consist of one person presenting an issue or a development for discussion – perhaps 10 minutes only of input in a one hour slot. The rest of the time is spent on group discussion. These are emphatically not conferences in the normal sense of the word. There is plenty of time for informal discussion as well and the value of the meetings grows as members come to know each other well. Each group has a closed e-mail group which can be used to continue mutual discussion and support during the time between meetings.

No group has more than 25 people in it. The place in a group belongs to the individual and not to the institution and so the same person attends the same group each year thus building up trust with other members. If someone leaves their place is automatically offered to their successor. If that person does not want the place, then it is allocated to the next person on the overall waiting list which is maintained for the Advisory Committee on Staffing by Margaret Oldroyd, De Montfort University.

Please contact Margaret at meo@dmu.ac.uk if you would like to be added to that list.