



# How to set up a study group<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Background

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The aim of these study groups is to support colleagues make more and more effective use of the increasing number of MOOCs for teachers available.

### 1.1. Why Study Groups?

For these large-scale online courses to be most effective, it is valuable for participating teachers to embed them within the normal practice of their teaching context. It makes it more likely that the work on the course will transfer to practice, e.g. the way learning designs are planned and shared, or the way the department or institution collaborates to move teaching to more blended, or where necessary, wholly online approaches.

The [European Gateway Teacher Academy](#) piloted the concept of school-based study groups in 8 schools across Europe. In these study groups teachers came regularly together to:

- Support and motivate each other throughout the course
- Provide structure to their learning by offering a place and time to work on it
- Discuss the topics and ideas in the context of the everyday realities
- Plan how to implement new ideas and practices after the course

The study groups offered a framework to support colleagues with low levels of digital and self-regulated learning competence to help them benefit from the course, and helped to localise what was learned, facilitating the transfer to practice. Feedback from study group participants and the 8 pilot teachers suggest that the study groups successfully addressed all of these areas. Teachers found it useful to create a working team to act as a multiplier for those colleagues who would like to engage but are held back by a thousand obstacles, real or feared (Elena Pezzi, Case Study Teacher, Italy).

The following sections offer guidance on how to setup a local study group, for teachers in any sector, which runs alongside a large-scale professional development course or MOOC.

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<sup>1</sup> This document derives from a report on the experiences of 8 pilot teachers who implemented school-based study groups alongside MOOCs offered by the [European Commission's School Education Gateway](#) in 2019.

## Setting up a study group

- Work with the senior leadership team in your department or institution, and their support will be very helpful
- Check they approve of the course and recognise its value
- Ask for active support by promoting it at meetings or in communications to teaching staff.
- Negotiate the degree of informal recognition they will offer participants in the study group as this may help convince colleagues to join, a separate certificate awarded internally, credits as part of any appraisal system, or at least an acknowledgement of the work done at meetings or in communication channels.

## Recruit colleagues

- Be ready to offer information about the course, e.g. the course information page, and to answer questions about how it works, and how the study group will support their learning and development.
- Inform colleagues via, e.g. a presentation at a staff meeting, messages in staff newsletters or similar communication channels, social media channels, for example via Facebook groups or WhatsApp groups you already use.
- Start by recruiting your closest colleagues, as that will be of most value to you, and use that to form a base group for persuading further colleagues to join.
- Provide the information and link to enrol on the course, along with an invitation to the first meeting of the group.

## Plan the group sessions

- Set a schedule for meetings, relating to the timing of when the course runs, using, e.g. Doodle or your local scheduling tool
- Request a room for meetings

## Running the Study Group Sessions

- At the first meeting of the group, focus on getting colleagues registered on the course platform and enrolled in the course, as well as guiding them on how to navigate the course environment.
- Decide whether it is best for the group to study in their own time and meet to discuss specific issues arising from the course, or to use meetings to work together on the steps in the course. Most pilot teachers found a mix worked, as members were often too busy to go through the relevant course modules in advance of the sessions.
- The last meeting could be organised as a moment where the participants present their work on the course, to assist the transfer to practice, or to explain when and how they plan to implement what they have learned during the course.

- The group may also wish to discuss how to maintain the spirit of collaboration outside of the study group context longer term.

This was the experience of a pilot teacher who successfully implemented a mix of both approaches (Celeste Simoes, Pilot Teacher, Portugal):

- We did the different modules of the course more or less at the same time – some face-to-face in school and others at home, which allowed participants to experience different situations.
- Sometimes we were working together at school, which allowed for a closer support on my part, sometimes we worked at home where each one had to take decisions on their own and only in urgent situations did they contact me.
- I always did the modules beforehand, in order to act as the facilitator, and would add my comments to the different activities in my Learning Diary, so teachers could have a model. We shared the links to our learning diaries so we could follow everybody's work. This meant we created a network that scaffolded the teachers' work.

## The study group experience

Pilot teachers found that the study groups offered a valuable and valued space for exchange and collaboration more generally, bringing together colleagues from different subject areas who otherwise rarely exchanged with each other. Also, the fact that the groups were led by local colleagues resulted in an informal and communal feel to the meetings, facilitating the collaborative spirit of the groups.

Creating such spirit is helped by maintaining good and regular communications with the group, for example by creating a dedicated Facebook or WhatsApp group where questions can be asked in between meetings. Of course, it is important to be sensitive to the kind of engagement study group participants are looking for and being aware of not overburdening or spamming group members with many messages or expectations to engage at all times.

One study group followed-up their work with the organisation of open-door lessons where they implemented the lesson plans prepared as part of the course and invited each other for observations and subsequent discussions on how to improve their work.