**WRITING RETREATS – A MASON INSTITUE BRIEFING NOTE**

**Broad considerations**  
When thinking about a suitable location, you might want to take the following into consideration:

Availability (University rooms can be hard to book during term time).  
Distance from workplace to retreat.  
Frequency of meetings.  
How large a group you expect on a regular basis.  
Access via public transport and for anyone will specific access needs.  
Access to shops/café/restaurants for lunch.  
Comfort: space, table, chairs, plugs, light and room temperature.

Consider also whether there are other groups with a similar format near you, and whether they might be open to joining forces. A larger group means that you will have at least a few people attending each session.

**Choosing your audience**

Before you set up a writing retreat, consider who you audience is. Here are some possible groups:

* Senior researchers
* PhD students and ECCR (early career and contract researchers)
* Students Only
* Members of the same institute or department

You will have to decide whether it is better to have a departmental writing group (i.e. building relationships with colleagues, creating a protected space away from inter-departmental commitments) or a broader interdisciplinary group (i.e. time away from colleagues, and away from content-related and disciplinary discussions). The most successful retreats comprise colleagues at a similar stage in their careers. This is because they will have similar writing demands, needs and frustrations.

**What is a writing retreat?**

The central purpose of a writing retreat is to create a supportive environment, and dedicate protected time for members to spend a substantial amount of time writing

Most academics have several commitments (teaching, marking, meetings, grant applications, lab work, conferences etc.), and often find that writing gets relegated to the bottom of the to-do list.

The retreats are an opportunity to dedicate and commit to some time away from all those distractions and to nurture a regular writing habit.

**Further reading**

The Mason Institute writing retreats are modelled on the University of Edinburgh Institute for Academic Development. More information on organising retreats can be found here: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/research-roles/research-only-staff/courses/writing-retreats>

Also a fun read: Paul J. Silvia (2007), How to Write a Lot, American Psychological Association.

**Incentives**

Consider enhancing the experiences of your members by:

Taking turns to bring some chocolates or fruit for the break  
Enquiring whether your department or institute have funds to buy coffee/snack/fruits for the group  
Celebrating a colleague who has successfully submitted or published a piece of work that was developed at the retreats  
Going for a coffee, lunch or a drink at the end of the term to celebrate your hard work.

**Format for the retreat**

The format for the retreats will partly depend on the frequency of the meetings. But here are a few general guidelines you might want to consider:

Timings:

Dedicated writing times interspersed with breaks, for example:  
60 mins writing block  
15 mins break  
90 mins writing block  
90 mins lunch break  
75 mins writing block  
15 mins break  
90 mins writing block

Facilitator:  
It is worth nominating one or more persons as facilitator(s), who will be in charge of strictly implementing the writing and break times, as well as marking the start and the end of the retreat. All members can take turns in taking on this role.   
  
Other helpful measures:   
Implementing a strict, no-internet policy, at least during the writing blocks  
  
Starting the day with a few minutes dedicated to setting personal goals for the day and sharing these with the group. It is worth encouraging everyone to set specific goals for each writing block.   
  
Ending the day with a self-evaluation shared around the group: have I reached my writing goals for the day? Where my targets and plan for the day too ambitious? Not ambitious enough? What shall I do differently next time?