Facilitating Interactive Plenaries

The philosophy behind these sessions is that candidates will learn together and be interdependent learners when given the opportunity. They can engage in a collaborative construction of knowledge through pooling their resources, including those acquired from their pre-course online learning. More of them will be actively engaged than would be in an instructor-dominated lecture.

The activities have been deliberately designed to appeal to a variety of learner types so not everyone will like all of them. Mentors will need to be sensitive to the frustrations of these candidates.

Additional tips for instructors facilitating plenary sessions:

- **Preparation prior to the session is absolutely vital.**
- Time management is likewise, so you should plan this carefully prior to the session.
- When you **set up an activity, be very clear with your instructions**. Make sure that the group are still listening to you rather than starting to work without really knowing what they are doing. Be available for the candidates to request clarification without imposing on them. The learning will not be as effective if it is all done through you, so avoid engaging with a group beyond simple clarification. If there is not a slide reinforcing the activity consider writing it up onto the flipchart/whiteboard to provide visual stimulus.
- After setting up the groups, your next challenge is re-gaining the attention of the candidates when they are working. If noise levels are high this is probably a good sign as they are focused and attentive but it will be difficult to attract their attention. You may try some strategies:
  - Before the groups begin the activity set up the way in which you will bring them back together. So for example say to them "when I do X I'd like you to stop working and rejoin the large group".
  - Before the group begins **tell them how long they will have to work on the activity.**
  - Walk around the room asking the groups if they are ready and telling them that you are about to stop.
  - Ask the group to finish the idea that they are currently discussing.
  - Pick a moment when there is a lull in the noise level.
  - Have an awareness of whereabouts the groups seem to be within the tasks without interrupting them and when they change their activity level choose this moment to stop them.

- Feedback from the group can take as long as the activity itself. **Avoid repeating candidate work unnecessarily**; rather, seek from candidates the results of their work.
- Involve co-facilitator to write key messages on whiteboard. This enables facilitator to maintain eye contact and focus on group dynamics with aim to invite responses and/or further application points from expertise/knowledge within the room

- Always make sure that **you reinforce the take home messages** just as you would in a standard lecture & **reference** to skill stations, discussion groups and **scenarios that will provide further opportunities to apply the key points** raised in the plenary.