

Transnational Round Table on Magnonics, High-Frequency Spintronics, and Ultrafast Magnetism (TRTM): Frequently Asked Questions

Motivation and aims

Can't we just organize schools, conferences, and meetings in the same way as we always did?

No, we cannot. The format of meetings for scientific dissemination has always evolved and will continue to evolve, whether we want it or not. There are already calls for virtual meeting formats to replace face-to-face conferences, listing multiple problems with the latter. Such calls will only become stronger (for good reasons), creating a “change or die” situation for face-to-face scientific meetings as we have known them. Our view is that we should try to adapt and see how it goes – we might fail, or we might find that the new format suits better the new normalities (whatever this means) of this fast-changing life.

Why do we all over sudden need statutes? Life is complicated already!

One does not need a set of written rules when there are well-established and well-known traditions and practices (which replace the rules), as in the case of conventional scientific conferences.

However, when changing the tradition, a set of written rules is helpful even if it is only needed for their communication. Moreover, the whole purpose of the format change in our case is to minimise effects of anyone's personal opinions in favour of decisions governed by a statute, which becomes impersonal once fixed (at least for each edition of the TRTM).

Why should we be forced to stick to certain procedures while we are mostly just trying to be reasonable?

The procedures are only the structure, and we will have to remain reasonable for this structure to work. There is no illusion: the rules will be unable to cater for all eventualities of the organisation, and so, appropriate exceptions may need to be made, while staying consistent with our main goal.

Format, scope, and programme

May and June may not be the best timing in terms of teaching and studying in some countries.

This is a pragmatic choice of time that is less strongly populated by other magnetic conferences and is convenient from the viewpoint of local organisation in Exeter. At the same time, we are aware that there is no one size to fit all and that exceptions will need to be made, e.g. to reach other audiences, participants, and local organiser teams for whom the current timing is less convenient.

I would allow the Scientific Advisory Board to decide where the next edition of the TRTM will be organized. Now it seems that everything will be done in Exeter.

The venue is Exeter only initially, to avoid uncertainty with the local organisation and therefore to be able to focus on delivery of the new format. Suggestions of other venues will be welcome later, and the Scientific Advisory Board will be involved in the selection. Exeter will remain a safety net in case there are no alternative proposals.

It might be good to go for shorter talks and more discussion time with a discussion leader being an invited senior scientist leading the discussion after each session.

We are trying to avoid multiplication of talk formats, and so, they will all have the same duration. As to the panel discussions after a session, we trialled this at the School in Porto in 2022, with some success. So, we might organise similar discussions again, albeit the discussion leaders will likely be volunteers from the audience, as before.

What if the balance starts drifting towards one of the three themes?

Then so be it! We let the community to define the interdisciplinary boundaries (whatever they are).

One might consider early researcher representatives / committee members, who define topics of relevance for them.

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There is only one science for all, and this is not a student or early career researcher conference. However, the proposed format contains a direct scientific lift for researchers of all career stages to the Scientific Advisory Board, which will enable them to have a say on relevance of scientific topics.

Should we add a section on proposal writing / paper writing?

Perhaps, as a supplementary activity in one of the future editions of the TRTM.

So, this is not a School then?

Correct.

Should we link the TRTM to the organization of the Magnonics Conference?

Given the broad scope of the TRTM, there are also other conferences (e.g. ICMM, UMC, GRC) to worry about. The coordination with other conferences has always been and will remain an issue, but we hope the new format will allow us to complement rather than to compete with them.

The annual frequency of the TRTM might not allow us to secure a critical mass of participants.

Achieving the critical mass is the main challenge for the TRTM as a new conference. The hypothesis is that the increased frequency will be compensated by the rotation of the topics and speakers, both facilitated by the new selection procedures. We also hope that the TRTM will become a go-to place to engage in our inclusive pathfinding and collaboration building activities (e.g. in terms of Horizon Europe calls), offering a plenty of attraction beyond the main scientific programme.

The presence of words "Conference", "Workshop", or "School" in the name of an event would simplify (for attendees from institutions with very strict accounting departments) reporting on funds, without an explanation of what a "round table" is.

The TRTM is explicitly identified as a Conference in its statute, while we hope the term "Round Table" will become as acceptable as its more traditional counterparts.

The Statute does not reflect a bottom-up process (it is not the community of young researchers who organize this event). I suggest leaving out "bottom-up".

Term "bottom-up" may refer to multiple dimensions and relationships. The specific relationship addressed in our case is that between the participants and organisers of the TRTM, whereby today's contributing participants are tomorrow's invited speakers, and today's invited speakers form tomorrow's Scientific Advisory Board. This is a bottom-up process, and one aim of the TRTM is to make it independent from the person's age, career stage, and other irrelevant distinctions.

How does the TRTM's format compare with that of the Gordon Research Conferences (GRCs)?

The GRCs and the TRTM are organised differently – "top-down" and "bottom-up", respectively. Both formats encourage debate, but the TRTM also simplifies the path to contributing to the debate, the results of which will be disseminated to a broader audience.

Audience

What is the intended audience career-wise?

The TRTM will be attractive to scientists of all career stages, perhaps for different reasons in each case.

The self-nomination procedure may be less attractive to more established researchers.

Speakers invited to deliver talks at hierarchical conferences are also expected to submit abstracts of their talks and to register. The burden of self-nomination is no greater than that.

More established scientists might be disinterested in going through the selection procedure.

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The Round Table is organised under a hypothesis that the majority of established scientists are driven by the urge to disseminate their discoveries and expertise to wider and more diverse audiences. So, the selection will not serve as a deterrent, while a significant number of both early career and established researchers will come even without presentation duties to contribute to other aspects of the programme.

Organising committee

The role of the Topical Gatekeepers is not so clear; it could represent a superstructure over the Scientific Advisory Board.

The role of Topical Gatekeepers is to do the legwork for which the Board would be too large. The prominent examples (and main tasks) are the sifting of the self-nominations (i.e. deciding if they fall within the scope of TRTM), advising and talking to the candidates (e.g. if there are ways the self-nomination is missing some info or could be strengthened by including some), and finalising the programme. Due to the simplified format of the Round Table, the Gatekeepers will in fact have less authority than a programme or organising committee of a typical conference.

The Topical Gatekeepers should include researchers who originate from Asia (like China, Taiwan, Japan, the USA, Australia, South America, etc.

Indeed. However, the Topical Gatekeepers are already a geographically diverse team, and the TRTM's immediate focus will be to achieve a similar or greater diversity, geographically and otherwise, in the programme and so also in the Scientific Advisory Board.

What is the role of the local organisers?

The Local Organising Committee will be responsible for local organisation only, while the scientific part will always remain the responsibility of the Gatekeepers and the Scientific Advisory Board.

An organigram on the website would be helpful.

Perhaps, but this will not be out immediate priority – we might add it in future.

There is still a hierarchy in the organization of the Round Table.

There is no hierarchy, which is replaced by appropriate structures. The Scientific Advisory Board is independent from the Secretary and Topical Goalkeepers, and vice versa.

Rules and procedures

The rules seem too complex.

The rules might be marginally more complex than usual, due to the multiple cut-off dates for selection. Otherwise, the impression is due to them being written rather than notional.

The 14 days might be too short to secure the money and confirm the acceptance.

The assumption is that a scientist submitting their self-nomination has already decided they would like to accept the invitation and have funding necessary to fund their trip. If a visa is required, they should submit their self-nomination to the early-bird selection rounds. One can also get a visa invitation as a contributing participant and then submit a self-nomination to a later selection round.

What about rich groups sending many students, which can skew the vote for the Best Poster award?

Participants will be unable to vote for their own posters or posters of their colleagues.

I think that there should be a committee providing an acknowledgement concerning the science, presentation, etc. such that students can learn from the poster competition.

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It is a job shared by all more experienced participants to provide feedback of this sort to younger colleagues.

Invited speakers: Selection and restrictions

What about different researchers working in different research groups but are in the same institution? Can't we replace an "institution" by a "research group" ("research laboratory")?

We will stick to applying the restrictions based on the institutional rather than research group / laboratory affiliations. This will spare the organisers from the need to investigate links between researchers and the structure of individual institutions and will promote diversification of the programme.

Does it imply that if I am invited then there is no chance for my colleague X working in my institution on a completely different yet relevant topic to be invited?

Not quite right, since your colleague's self-nomination might still be selected in the last (i.e. February) selection round as an exception, with "any exceptions ... made with consideration of the institution's structure and the goal of diversifying the representation in the Round Table and its organisation."

What about negative impact on institutions hosting several groups working on relevant topics?

We believe the negative impact to be minimal, reduced by several factors: (i) this is an annual conference, which allows us to accommodate three different invite speakers in three consecutive years; (ii) the number in (i) may be increased via making use of exceptions allowed in the last (i.e. February) selection round and by winning the Round Table's Best Poster award in the previous year; (iii) the authors of rejected self-nominations are not excluded from participation in the Round Table.

What about negative impact of the restrictions on the quality of self-nominations?

The Round Table is organised under a hypothesis that the enhanced diversity enabled by the restrictions will have a positive rather than negative impact on the quality of self-nominations and the event, more generally.

What if we must choose from a small number of not so good self-nominations in one of the selection rounds?

Firstly, the idea of the selection model is to avoid judging on absolute merits of self-nominations but only to rank them and only if required by the capacity of the programme. Secondly, this is one of our tasks to ensure the Round Table attracts strong self-nominations.

Could we increase the time between submission cut-off dates to get better statistics, or perhaps vote only when there are at least 10/15/20 self-nominations?

The multiple cut-off dates (including very early ones) are essential to give more time those who need it to obtain visas, secure funding, or even simply to make cheaper travel arrangements.

Exclusion of co-authorship on the submitted topic is fine, but a strict exclusion of co-authorship (even on different topics or longer in the past) might be too restrictive.

To be clear, the restriction applies only to co-authorship of the talks to be presented at one and the same edition of the Round Table, as judged from the list of co-authors of the talk abstracts and references to the work covered.

What about co-authorship for theory and experiment of an important result?

It is still the same result.

Reducing the votes of two Board members from the same institution seems a bit unfair, e.g. if they work on different topics and are independent from each other.

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The selection voting is a duty rather than a benefit of the Board members. The restriction is meant to break any positive feedbacks in the selection, and fairness for the applicants is its overarching aim.

The requirement to self-nominate might contradict the aim of inclusivity by affecting disproportionately strongly representatives of certain cultural backgrounds.

The format of the Round Table is not a silver bullet but aims to enhance the choice accessible by representatives of different cultural backgrounds.

Will sponsors identified as co-organisers acquire voting rights or be otherwise engaged in the selection of invited speakers? If so, this needs to be avoided / clarified.

To clarify, the role of sponsors identified as co-organisers of (a specific edition of) the TRTM will always be limited to its non-scientific aspects.

Perhaps, the Scientific Advisory Committee should decide if a sponsor can be a co-organiser?

This is not a scientific decision. So, this will be decided by the Local Organising Committee (as the entity responsible for the budget) and the Secretary and Gatekeepers (as guarantors of the Statute).