

Young gastroenterologists angle: Friends of the UEG young talent group consensus statement on the structure of young gastroenterology sections

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Europe, Young Gastroenterology Sections (YGS) play a crucial role in the success of national gastroenterology organizations and societies. Both trainees and national organizations benefit by including the next generation of gastroenterologists (GI). Specifically, national organizations have the chance to nurture future leaders, promote innovation and new perspectives, enhance diversity and inclusivity as well as ensure future sustainability and growth of the national society. Young trainees benefit through targeted support and mentorship fitting their needs, networking opportunities with peers, and by having a clear voice for representation and advocacy for the needs of the next generation of gastroenterologists.

Many national organizations in the UEG member states already work and coordinate well with their respective young sections. Nevertheless, the structure of young GI sections in UEG member societies is heterogeneous. Some national organizations currently do not have a formal young GI section.¹ Previously, the UEG Young Talent Group published a 'cookbook' on how to start a young GI section^{2,3} giving valuable insights into the pivotal steps in the first months. Notably, this document does not sufficiently address the desired long-term structure and maintenance of young GI sections. In our eyes, a durable and practical structure is fundamental to long-term effective cooperation and success. Therefore, we present a consensus on a possible structure for national young GI sections.

TRUE REPRESENTATION OF THE DIVERSE NEXT GENERATION OF GASTROENTEROLOGISTS IS FUNDAMENTAL

A clear definition of who qualifies as a young gastroenterology section member is necessary to accurately represent the next generation. The threshold could be either age (e.g. younger than 40 years)

or the state of specialty training (e.g. members who have finished their gastroenterology training in the last 3 years). Exceptions to colleagues with non-linear careers, such as times of childcare or research breaks, are an effective tool to reflect the diversity of individual vitae.

Future gastroenterologists with an academic as well as non-academic background and a focus on outpatient or inpatient care should be invited to join the young gastroenterology section to manifest the whole breadth of gastroenterology. Successful gastroenterology is diverse and interprofessional, and young GI sections should be open to professionals with a shared interest in gastroenterology besides physicians (e.g. early-career basic and translational scientists, dietologists, and nurse practitioners with a GI or endoscopic focus). Allowing medical students to be part of the Young GI sections or devising specific events targeted at students is another way of raising the interest of potential future colleagues in the field of gastroenterology.

DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES: INCREASE PARTICIPATION AND TRANSPARENCY

A speaker or spokesperson should be elected by members of the section. To guarantee continuity, a team of speakers and vice-speakers with overlapping terms, and progression from vice-speaker to speaker should be considered. Additional designated posts (e.g. treasurer), should also be determined through election by the section members. Implementing a term limit ensures the ongoing renewal of young gastroenterology section leadership. To promote equality and representation throughout the YGS and to embrace the heterogeneity of the next generation of gastroenterologists, rules on gender, geographic, or ethnic origin of the speaker team (e.g. gender-parity with regards to speaker and vice-speaker) should also be considered.

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REGULAR INTERNAL AND JOINT MEETINGS ARE THE CORNERSTONE OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Meetings between young section speakers and society representatives are crucial for exchange and maximizing productivity. Therefore, there should be regular meetings to discuss joint projects, needs, and future directions. At these meetings, the speaker team should represent the young GI section, and a dedicated representative of the society's secretariat and possibly the board should be present. Additionally, board members and project leads on specific young gastroenterology section projects can be invited to join the meetings on a need-to-attend basis, but the size should always be limited to promote effective work. The minutes of the meetings should be shared among all members for feedback and transparency.

A fixed position on the board of national gastroenterology societies for the speaker or another member of the young gastroenterology section, preferably with full voting rights, can further enhance cooperation, as it improves information flow between YGS and national organizations.

Additionally, YGS should hold regular internal open meetings for transparency and integration of all members in decision-making. Here, online or hybrid formats can help to increase participation. Updates on current and planned projects should be given, and the meetings should serve as a forum for feedback from and involvement of all young gastroenterology section members. A culture of transparency helps to improve participation and foster a feeling of belonging.

THE CONSIDERABLE EXPERTISE HELD BY THE NEXT GENERATION OF GASTROENTEROLOGISTS IS A RESOURCE THAT SHOULD BE UTILIZED

The expertise held by members of the next generation should be utilized in national meetings, including (co-)chairing sessions and giving lectures. The YGS can help identify suitable members for any specific theme. A quota of (co-)chairs from the next generation at meetings is a possibility to ensure adequate representation. Additionally, opportunities to independently plan sessions should be implemented so that the focus of the next generation has the forum it deserves. Also, YGS should be involved in choosing recipients for awards, particularly awards promoting the career development of the next generation (e.g. abstract awards, poster prizes, travel grants, etc.). National societies should consider supporting the young gastroenterology section to organize small meetings or workshops with concise topics.

Additionally, it is important to establish scientific networks for multicenter studies to involve and empower young gastroenterology researchers. Either, young gastroenterology section research projects can be integrated into existing networks, thereby promoting young researchers in gastroenterology. Alternatively, the YGS can be supported to establish their own network, facilitating collaboration

and exchange of ideas between young researchers and institutions. As a future perspective, we see the linkage of several national research networks to a European network of young gastroenterology researchers as a way to foster international multicenter research, and ultimately, improve patient outcomes through increased scientific collaboration.

SUPPORT FOR YOUNG SECTIONS IS VITAL TO ENHANCE THEIR IMPACT


Besides engagement at national meetings, support by the national society to the young gastroenterology section projects should be provided. Projects could include but are not limited to 'summer schools' with a clinical or scientific focus, postgraduate training, or ongoing education possibilities, as well as projects aimed at influencing professional policy on a national level. To meet the needs of the next generation and motivate young volunteers to apply themselves, a high degree of freedom in planning for the YGS is beneficial.⁴

Funding and administrative support are vital aspects for the success and growth of young gastroenterology section projects. Each section should establish rules on acceptable sources of funding (e.g. third-party or industry funding) and conditions for accepting funding from external sources. National gastroenterology societies should communicate a transparent budget for their respective YGS. Administrative support is just as crucial as funding and smoothens cooperation. Therefore, a clerical position in the society's secretariat should support the YGS.

THE INVESTMENT IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF GASTROENTEROLOGISTS WILL ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF EUROPEAN GASTROENTEROLOGY

In summary, integrating young gastroenterologists into national gastroenterology organizations is essential for the success of national organizations as a whole. Without a clear structure, the long-term success of YGS hinges on personal enthusiasm and engagement, limiting their positive impact. Any investment in the next generation will bring future dividends for national organizations and the field of gastroenterology.⁵ Due to heterogeneous local conditions, the suggestions in this article will need adjustment with local particularities in mind. The involvement of the next generation of gastroenterologists in finding the ideal local structure is crucial.

By implementing a clear structure and guidelines, YGS can continue contributing to the growth and success of national gastroenterology associations throughout Europe.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The creation of this consensus statement did not involve the utilization of primary data. Given the absence of primary data usage, the availability of data in this context is not applicable.

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