

Organising a conference

Humanities Postgraduate Research and
Professional Skills Training

Objectives and overview

Provide useful hints and tips on organising a conference, with practical exercises to think through the process in four main areas: content, funding, marketing, administration and planning.

As a result of attending this session you will be able to:

- Identify opportunities and generate ideas for organising a conference;
- Reflect on the key questions and steps in organising a conference;
- Make an initial plan for a conference in 4 main areas: content, funding, marketing and administration.

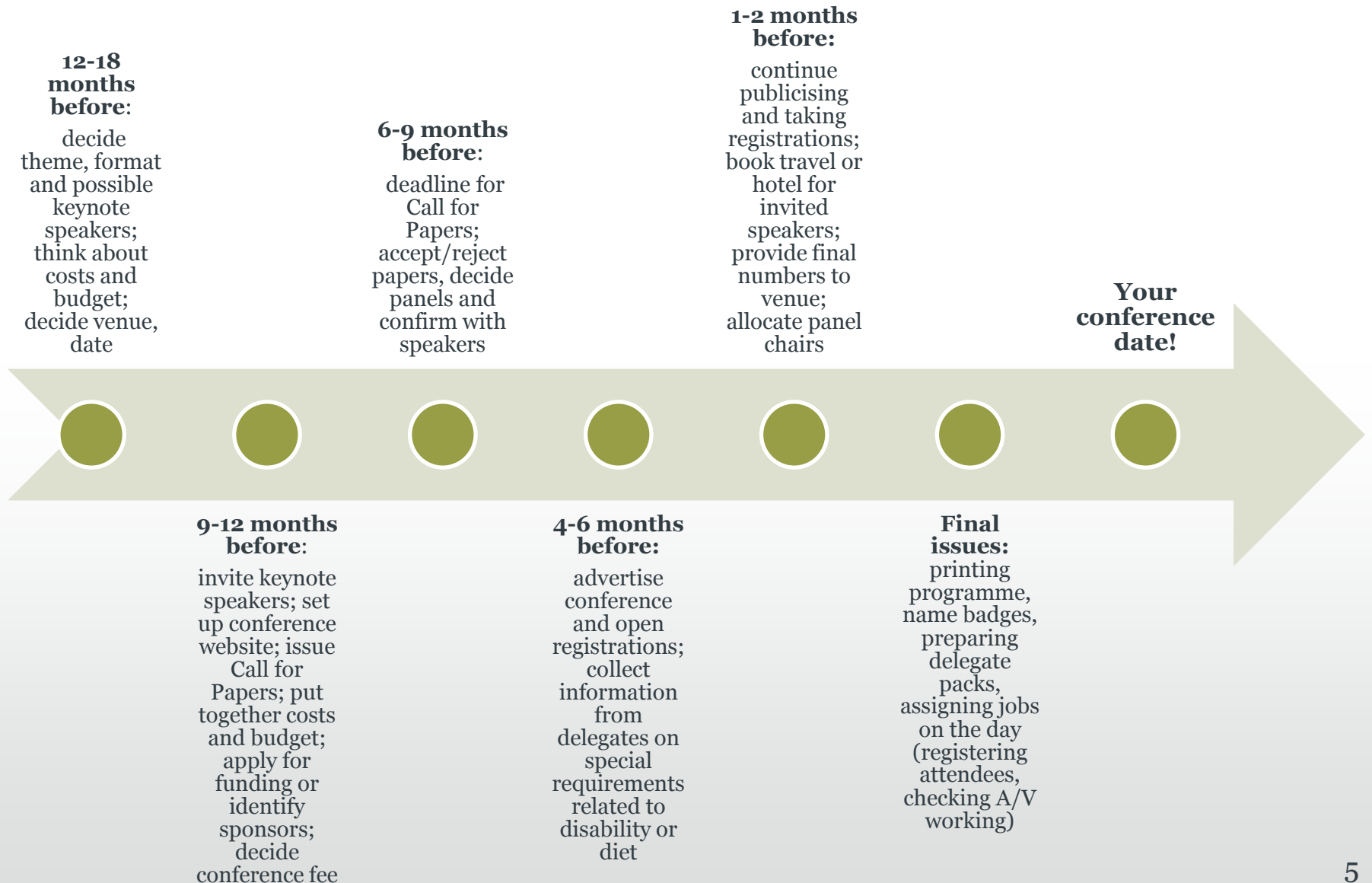
Opportunities to organise a conference

- GradNet annual conference (Humanities)
- Working with advisors or others in your department
- Through funded research projects
- Working with subject associations
- Designing from scratch

The big questions

- **Content:** What is the conference about? What format will it have?
- **Finance:** What will the costs be and how will they be covered?
- **Marketing:** How will you get people to attend?
- **Administration:** Who will do all the work?

All these questions need to be considered 12-18 months before you wish to hold the conference.



Conference content: format

- Conference with invited keynote(s) and a Call for Papers
 - Includes keynote sessions, panel sessions (single or parallel), possibly workshops/demonstrations/other types of session
- Symposium with only invited keynotes
- Workshop with mainly interactive sessions
- Consider different types of session: PechaKucha or 'lightning talks'
- Don't forget the social sessions: lunches, coffee/tea breaks, conference dinner, other social activities

Conference content: topic or theme

- Your theme needs to be:
 - Broad enough to encompass different papers and sub-themes
 - Connected to current issues in the field
 - Different from other recent conferences
- Recent examples held at Southampton:
 - Identities & Islam: The First UK Early Career Symposium on Islamic Archaeology
 - Language, Culture and Power in France (ASMCF September 2014)

Group exercise: content

- In a group of 4-5 discuss and decide:
 - A theme for your conference
 - A format and rough timetable (number of days, sessions, etc.)
 - Possible keynote speakers or topics
 - How many delegates you would like to attract

Funding

Costs

- Venue
- Equipment
- Catering
- Conference dinner
- Speakers' expenses
- Publicity
- Programmes
- Name badges
- Staff time

Funding sources

- Apply for funding:
 - Internal (limited)
 - Funding councils
 - Other initiatives
- Sponsorship
 - Subject associations
 - Publishers
 - Businesses
 - Individuals
- Delegate fees

Managing money (at Southampton)

- Make contact with Finance office to obtain conference costings form needed for sub-project code
 - Confirm current charges for overheads on expenditure (6%)
 - **Tip:** over-estimate costs and under-estimate income
 - Identify who will act as budget holder (e.g. Head of Department)
- If charging a fee, submit online store application form
- Budget can be tracked through Agresso (by budget holder) but keep your own records in Excel as well
- Payments out made through Agresso to approved suppliers

Finance intranet (for forms and other information):

<https://intranet.soton.ac.uk/sites/finance/wiki/Home.aspx>

Group exercise: funding

- In your group identify:
 - Costs that will need to be paid out for your conference
 - Work or costs that will be donated
 - Possible sources of funding or sponsorship
 - Will you need to charge a fee?

First round of Marketing: Getting papers

- Issue Call for Papers 9-12 months before date, with closing date 6-9 months before date (can be extended)
- Call for Papers should include: title/theme, date and venue, invited keynotes, possible topics for contributions, closing date, contact details
- For Call for Papers circulation:
 - Conference website
 - Personal contacts
 - Email lists and websites
<http://www.conferencealerts.com/>
 - Subject association and other newsletters

Second round of Marketing: Getting attendees

- Accept/reject papers and put into panels with connected themes (4-6 months before date)
- Open registrations and publicise again to email lists etc.
- Provide draft conference programme on website
- Get speakers to publicise for you through their websites, Twitter, blogs, etc.
- Printed posters or postcards can be sent to other universities (or electronic copies can be circulated)

Group exercise: marketing

- In your group identify:
 - Which disciplines your conference might attract and how to publicise to them
 - How you might reach different audiences: postgraduate students, interdisciplinary researchers, practitioners, non-academic audiences...
 - Identify email lists or websites you might target to list the conference
 - Do you want a printed poster or postcard?

Administration and planning

- Liaising with speakers and invited keynotes
- Liaising with funders or sponsors
- Taking registrations (possibly through online store)
- Collecting information from delegates on special requirements related to disability or diet
- Booking travel or hotel for invited speakers
- Liaising with venue - providing final numbers, confirming catering options, A/V requirements
- Printing and preparing programme, name badges and other materials for delegate packs (leave time for print centre if using)
- Try: [Open Conference Systems](#) or [Eventbrite](#) (if not using Southampton online store)

On the day...

- Have some (student) helpers
- Register attendees and give out programmes/packs/name badges
- Check A/V working
- Reconfirm catering arrangements
- Try to keep sessions running to time
- Evaluation forms from delegates
- After the event: finalise finances, pay travel claims and invoices from venue/catering

Group exercise: administration

- In your group...
 - List the jobs that will need to be done in the 2 weeks before the conference
 - List the jobs that will need to be done on the day of the conference
 - How many people will you need on the day of the conference to help?

Further information

- Finance intranet (for forms and other information, including Faculty contacts):
<https://intranet.soton.ac.uk/sites/finance/wiki/Home.aspx>
- Online store (ols@soton.ac.uk) :
<http://store.southampton.ac.uk/>
- Hospitality (catering): hospitality@soton.ac.uk
- AV requests: serviceline@soton.ac.uk
- Room bookings: <http://www.adminservices.soton.ac.uk/>

Slides available on [Blackboard PGR-RS course](#)/ Training Materials/Career Planning and Employability