

PSAI ANNUAL CONFERENCE ARRANGEMENTS

Our annual conference is the highlight of the year for the *Political Studies Association of Ireland*, and it is right to acknowledge from the outset the valuable and valued contribution which the host department and conference convenor makes to the work and standing of the PSAI. The purpose of this note is to make explicit the financial arrangements between the PSAI and the convenors of the Association's annual conferences. It is intended to serve as a background note for those departments considering hosting future conferences. A separate note on the academic and administrative elements involved in convening the conference is also available, written by previous organisers.

The starting point for such consideration must be that the conference is explicitly intended to be self-financing – at least cost neutral and preferably capable of generating modest revenue for the Association. This is something which needs to be clear in all the arrangements around the conference – so, for instance, the registration form should state that cheques are to be made out to the 'Political Studies Association of Ireland'. Whatever venue is being used needs to know from the outset that the conference bill will be paid on the PSAI chequebook at the end of the conference. And, all revenue arising from the conference should be handed over by the convenor to the PSAI Treasurer or President at the end of the conference.

A key element of the ultimate price of the conference to attendees will inevitably be the location in which it is held. Some host departments prefer to hold the conference on campus, others choose to use a nearby hotel. From the Association's perspective, either option is fine, and the decision is entirely one for the host department. Each has its advantages and disadvantages, though it is generally the case that the costs will be lower on campus. If a hotel is being used, the convenor will want to get quotes from at least 3 or 4 alternatives before reaching a decision.

It is crucial to realise that in no circumstances should a convenor have anything whatever to do with booking bedrooms for attendees. The PSAI will absolutely refuse to make good any losses which the host department incurs in such a situation. (It is, though, helpful if the convenor can put together some information for attendees on local hotels/guesthouses, in order that individuals can make their own arrangements.) The convenor may be able to negotiate with the venue a discount rate for accommodation if individuals book a room before a certain date, but should certainly not reserve or pre-book any bedrooms themselves on behalf of potential or actual attendees. The management of the venue in which the conference is held must be made absolutely clear as to who exactly is empowered to authorise expenditure on behalf of the conference – this must be a small group of people from the host department and the PSAI committee (agreed in advance on both sides). The PSAI will not be responsible for any expenses incurred by anyone outside this small and explicitly agreed group of people.

The PSAI accepts all financial liabilities (other than those mentioned above) arising from the conference, and in return is due in full from the host department all income produced by the conference. However, the Association does expect to be regularly consulted by the convenor as decisions with a financial implication are under consideration. The convenor should communicate freely with the PSAI President and

Treasurer as a matter of routine, and it has in the past been found to be useful if the convenor (or his or her representative) is able to attend meetings of the PSAI committee in the year leading up to each conference.

Other factors which will contribute to the global cost of the conference include: provision for teas/coffees during conference breaks; the hire of any audio-visual equipment thought necessary; the booking of sufficient rooms of sufficient size in which to hold all conference sessions (this will depend in part on how many concurrent panels are planned); the conference dinner which takes place on the final evening of each conference; possibly the travel expenses of any keynote plenary speaker; perhaps a number of students to help with the administrative arrangements during the conference itself; a limited amount of advertising (the PSAI committee will ensure that the Call For Papers is widely circulated, and some useful free advertising can be arranged through the websites of other political studies associations, but previous organisers have found it useful to pay to advertise on selected commercial websites); and so on. Even a number of costs which are small in themselves – such as printing the conference programme, postage, name badges, and so on – can add up to a sizeable extra element of the total conference cost. Once a reasonable estimate can be made by the convenor of the total conference cost, it is then essential that the individual registration price is set at a level which is likely to at least recoup that expenditure.

On the revenue side, a number of considerations are worth bearing in mind. The Call For Papers should emphasise that panels will be held on topics which extend well beyond Irish politics. The more panels which can be accommodated on other disciplinary specialisms, the broader the potential pool of speakers (and thus, attendees) is. The lower the registration price can be held, the more attractive the conference will be to potential attendees (particularly postgraduate students), and thus the higher the registration revenue will be. At an early stage, convenors will want to give some thought as to how to raise revenue through both (cash and in-kind goods) sponsorship (from sources such as the local council, Chamber of Commerce, tourist board, publishers, local suppliers of goods or services likely to be of interest to attendees, and so on) and commercial exhibitors (predominantly national/international publishers of academic books and journals).

It will often be the case that the host department is prepared to pay for some form of reception for conference attendees. In addition, there is generally a book launch held during the conference, and the PSAI has a form which book authors can use to apply for PSAI funding for such events.

The conference registration form should always be worded in such a way as to offer a range of rates – member, student member, and non-members. The differential between the member and non-member rates should always be sufficiently high as to encourage non-members to simultaneously join the Association. (In the past, it has sometimes been the case that 80% of those attending the conference have not been PSAI members; in the future, this figure needs to be radically reduced in order to boost PSAI membership levels.) The student member rate should always involve a substantial reduction on the member rate. The registration form should explicitly state a date beyond which registration fees will not be refunded to those unable at the last minute to get to the conference. Clearly, the earlier the academic programme is

finalised and the earlier the registration forms are circulated, the earlier the convenor will have a clear sense of how many people are likely to be attending the conference, and thus of the likely revenue generated.

The PSAI committee thanks in advance those individuals and departments which are willing to consider hosting the annual conference, and reiterates that the Association's President and Treasurer are always available to discuss the financial, academic and administrative issues which need to be considered.