

Edinburgh 2002

Conference Review by ACIPFAL Chairman Dave Sexton

ACIPFAL CONFERENCE EXCEEDS ALL EXPECTATIONS

In the Edinburgh Moathouse between 25th and 28th June, ACIPFAL extended its run of exceptional conferences with, without doubt, the best to date. Every aspect of education was represented, including some excellent contributions from a group of CIPFA students, dubbed the National Students Forum, which for many was the highlight of an outstanding event.

The conference began with a day dedicated to academic research. A total of eight papers were presented, the quality of which impressed all delegates. Subjects covered included Best Value and ABC, PFI and PPP, transportation policy, tax compliance, political management arrangements, and university costing. Academics travelled from far and wide to attend (Clinton Alley from New Zealand travelled the furthest), and included colleagues from all universities delivering the CIPFA programme. Many of the papers presented will go on for publication in the 'Journal of Finance and Management in Public Services' when the referees are finally content.

On Wednesday 26th, the conference saw the arrival of student representatives from throughout the CIPFA regions. A total of seven students attended from six regions. They contributed to an enthralled audience beguiled by the devolution structures throughout the British Isles and Europe. David Dorward (Dundee City Council), Lisa James (Welsh Assembly), John Adams (IPPR), and Dermot Byrne (Government of Ireland) gave presentations on Scotland, Wales, England, and Europe respectively. Many delegates were left discussing and arguing the finer points of structural devolution, and far clearer about the future.

Wednesday was also to see the inaugural meeting of students invited from all the regions entitled 'National Students Forum' (NSF) with the concept of giving students a voice at the highest level and drawing on their ideas for the future. The sheer enthusiasm and commitment of Martina Lee (Southend on Sea Council), Sundeep Khaira (Leicestershire C.C.), Jayne Stephenson (Kirklees M.C.), Jane Cuthbertson (North Tyneside C.), Paul McMullan (Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority), Claire Gravil (North West NHS Exec.), and Rachel Richmond (Cardiff City) resulted in a workshop timed from 4 until 6, not finishing until 11 (with a break for dinner and wine served as critical sustenance). With the output from the workshop being presented the next day to the conference, the NSF were keen to get their content perfect. See picture (ACIPFAL 1) – Clockwise from far left – Claire, Paul, Jane, Jayne, Sundeep, Martina, and Rachel.

On Thursday the conference turned its mind to Education and Training matters, and was joined by Steve Freer (CIPFA CEO), Roger Tabor (President), Hilary Daniels (Vice President), Ken Gill (Director of E&T) and Vernon Soare (Director of Professional & Technical). After presentations from Steve and Ken, the focus turned to the students for their feedback, which was extraordinarily well presented. Given the audience size and content, Claire, Jayne and Martina delivered with style and composure which is a credit to the entire student body and bodes very well for CIPFA in the future. Feeding back analysis and ideas on recruitment and retention, marketing, and the role of the regions, the points made were well considered and no punches were pulled. The messages of 'Proud to be Public' and 'NSF – yes please' were very well received and immediately set hares running.

Thursday afternoon continued in an equally upbeat way, with contributions from Vernon Soare on professional standards, and Julia Attridge on the professional qualification. A great day ended with the Open Forum chaired by Dave Sexton (ACIPFAL Chairman) and including Steve, Ken, and Hilary (See picture ACIPFAL 2). There were no shortage of questions, and issues explored included the health sector, regional funding, and the future strategy for E&T.

The culmination of the conference, and indeed the ACIPFAL year, is the gala dinner on Thursday evening. With so much to celebrate from the last year (a new journal, website launch, seminar series, NSF launch, - not to mention its own coaster!), ACIPFAL was delighted that sponsorship from Napier University increased the number of colleagues who could join in the festivities. With over 50 diners, including tables of academics, students, local providers, and CIPFA in Scotland, the event was hugely enjoyable and suitably marked the year's success. Dave Sexton and Roger Tabor both spoke after dinner, to much enjoyment, hilarity and applause, and the event was bought to the perfect conclusion with the award of 'Excellence in Education' to Tony Dawson from Liverpool John Moores University – which was received with a standing ovation from all present. (See photos).

Finally, much, much later, delegates happily wound their weary way to bed, to dream of education, training, and a wonderful future for CIPFA, if the ACIPFAL conference is anything to go by.