

Association of CIPFA Lecturers (ACIPFAL) Conference
Edinburgh, June 26th – 28th 2002

Jayne Stephenson, Chair of the National Students Forum

It was with some trepidation that Jayne Stephenson and I attended the recent ACIPFAL conference in Edinburgh. We were encouraged to attend by James Ingham, Chair of the North East Region, Student Society having seen the conference advertised in Spreadsheet magazine, CIPFA newsletters and through our respective colleges. Even after enquiring from Christina Curtin (CIPFA, Robert Street) as to what it entailed, we were a little unsure as to what to expect, as we did not know a great deal about the Association or the conference.

We arrived at the Edinburgh Moat House hotel where five other students from around the regions had already gathered. Sunny Khaira (Midlands), Claire Grivil (North West), Martina Lee (South East), Paul McMullen (Scotland) and Rachel Richmond (South Wales and the West). With the exception of Rachel and I, none of us had met before. Rachel and I had met very briefly at the Annual CIPFA conference in Brighton a couple of weeks previously.

Wednesday 26th was a practitioner and student day with organised lectures on the following topics: -

- An overview of Scottish Government – David Dorward, Dundee City Council
- Devolution, the European perspective – Dermot Byrne, Department of Finance, Government of Ireland
- The National Assembly for Wales – Lisa James, National Assembly for Wales
- The next step in the devolution process : Englands regions – John Adams, Institute for Public Policy Research

All of the lectures were detailed and well presented. Whilst I won't pretend I understood all that was being presented, it was most informative and I have gathered literature that I am sure will be beneficial to me at some point in the future. Then it was time for the student workshops ...

The purpose of the workshops was to introduce a mechanism for dialogue between students, academics, practitioners and key personnel from Robert Street. More specifically, the issues that we raised this evening were to be presented at conference the following day. In addition to the academics and practitioners, there were a number of key Robert Street personnel present; Steve Freer (Chief Executive), Roger Tabor (President), Hilary Daniels (Vice President and Chair of CIPFA Education and Training Committee), Ken Gill (Education and Training Director) and Julia Attridge (Assistant Education and Training Director). A formidable audience for us humble students!

The workshops led by Dave Sexton (Chair of ACIPFAL) identified several main messages including: -

- We are "PROUD to be public" – i.e. work within the public sector. We as students attending the conference had chosen to work within the public sector and study the CIPFA qualification. We do not believe ourselves to be unique, I am sure we are indicative of most CIPFA students and we felt that there should be enhanced marketing regarding this fact;
- We felt that there could be improved branding / communications between Robert Street and students;
- We felt that there could be better focussed regional support between the Regions and employers;
- We really, REALLY want a National Students Forum – for students, run by students! We also believe that it is imperative that the focus of a forum is attached to future ACIPFAL conferences, as the conference is well attended by those in contact with students on a daily basis and who truly understand student needs.

None of the students have any direct involvement in strategic thinking or strategy development in our working environments, so, identifying the above messages was no easy task. Working until approximately 11.00pm (with a break for an evening meal) and fortified with a couple of glasses of wine to aid the creative flow, we did the business!

A slide show was devised for the next day (with the expert help of Dave Sexton) and Claire, Jayne and Martina gave excellent presentations (thanks girls!). The issues we identified and messages presented will be considered in the development of the new professional accountancy qualification – it really was special to be given the opportunity to have a ‘say’ in the future of the CIPFA qualification.

Thursday 27th June was Education and Training day with organised lectures on the following topics: -

- Developing the Institute – Steve Freer, Chief Executive, CIPFA
- CIPFA Education and Training, key issues and developments – Ken Gill, Education and Training Director, CIPFA
- Student Forum – led by Dave Sexton, Chair, ACIPFAL
- The impact of professional regulation – Vernon Soare, Policy and Technical Director, CIPFA
- Developing the new Professional Scheme Qualification – Julia Attridge, Assistant Director, CIPFA

The finale of the day was an open forum chaired by Dave Sexton, with Steve Freer, Hilary Daniels, and Ken Gill in attendance. It really felt good to be part of the CIPFA ‘family’.

That evening we attended the Gala dinner, followed by an expedition to Edinburgh hostels for a couple of night-caps – it would have been rude not too! Dermot Byrne, who spoke on the first day, took the opportunity to expand on his presentation and ensure everyone was suitably entertained!

What did I think of the conference? Excellent. I know that I am not alone in this sentiment. We all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and have become very good friends (the beauty of taking part and contributing to the CIPFA family). In addition, we also befriended many academics, practitioners and CIPFA personnel – in particular, Dave Sexton, Julia Attridge, Martin Rees-Jones (Nottingham Trent University), Christina Curtin, Elliot Rae (both CIPFA, Robert Street) and Dermot Byrne – they all both individually and collectively, ensured our contribution to the conference was all that more enjoyable!

Would I go again? Without a doubt.

Jane Cuthbertson
North Tyneside Council
North East Region.

10 July 2002