

Notes from Societies' and Lecturers' Discussion Forum, **24th November 2008, Kensington Town Hall**

The format of this meeting was similar to that held in October 2004 where Society members and Lecturers discussed various issues affecting both parties. This time, the meeting was attended by approximately 120 Society members, 40 Lecturers (including the 2 Lecturers' Representatives), 5 Trustees and 6 staff members. Discussion topics included Lecturers' fees and expenses, the report form grading system, and training and support on digital technology for both Societies and Lecturers.

The meeting was spilt into 14 tables each with ten to twelve delegates. Each discussion topic was introduced by David Bell who outlined the current position on the subject, plus issues that had been raised regarding it. At least one copy of David's summary was on each table. The meeting was chaired by the National Chairman and she allowed a set period of time to discuss the topic. Each table verbally reported, via a nominated spokesperson, a key point of the discussion that a majority of the table agreed on during the ensuing 'feedback session'. The tables were invited to continue to contribute their key points in rotation until all points had been made.

A general summary of the discussion together with the points made by delegates on each topic is given below. (Please note that some of the points oppose each other!)

Katherine Hill
Manager of Education

Discussion Topic 1: Lecturers' Fees & Expenses

Suggested Issues:

1. Confidentiality/disclosure regarding lecture fees
2. Fee levels
3. Satisfaction with the free market (non intervention, negotiation, few regulations)
4. Responsibilities of Lecturer and Society in relation to arrangements, including travel, communication and hospitality

Summary of Comments:

It was not generally thought that Lecturers' fees should be published in the Directory, nor any type of banding be introduced. There was a minority view that the Education Department should not disclose Lecturers' fees to Societies as it currently can do under the Terms for Accreditation and Inclusion in the Directory, however most tables seemed content with the current situation.

No comments were recorded which mentioned fee levels, other than to say that some Lecturers might be willing to reduce their fees if lecturing to a new Society. Some Lecturers at the meeting were willing to negotiate regarding their fee, others were not.

Generally the free market system currently operating works well. The willingness and skill to negotiate is regarded as very important, both on the part of the Lecturer and the Society (via the Programme Secretary).

Clear communication and information from both the Society and the Lecturer is vital when arranging a lecture. The fee, mode of transport, travel expenses, hospitality requirements, and time, venue and details of the lecture should all be clarified well before the lecture, and preferably at the time of booking. A few amendments to the NADFAS booking form were suggested, such as adding a space where the name of the nearest train station could be written.

From some of the comments made it was evident that Societies and Lecturers were not aware of some of the advice and guidelines already supplied by NADFAS House. For example, one table asked for information on cancelling a lecture, guidelines for which appear in the introduction to the Directory, though Societies and Lecturers do contact the ED to discuss specific cases.

Discussion Topic 2: Report Form Grading System

Suggested Discussion Topics:

1. Is the current feedback form completed by Societies with the range of ratings offered still considered appropriate?
2. Alternative proposals are occasionally suggested (e.g. should the ratings be simplified to 'satisfactory' versus 'unsatisfactory'?)
3. Are the feedback forms clear, understandable, easy to use and interpret?
4. Would Societies and Lecturers feel comfortable with the use of secure on-line feedback forms?

Summary of Comments:

The report form has been revised over a number of years to incorporate changes suggested or requested by both Societies and Lecturers. However, from comments made at the Forum, it appears that further revisions would be welcomed as it was generally agreed that the current form needs to be changed. Yet no clear consensus on what a future form should look like emerged and so it is likely that further consultation with both Societies and Lecturers must take place before a new form, very possibly with fewer assessment categories, can be designed and issued. As a reprint of the current report form is due soon, it might be that the current grading is used for the next few months while NADFAS House works towards producing a new form.

It was generally felt that it would be helpful to have guidance on what the current ratings mean, and the ED will produce these.

Although there were suggestions that the number of categories on the report form should be reduced, only one table supported the idea to have just 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory' ratings and two tables expressed their opposition to this proposal. Several tables suggested that the ratings be replaced by a numerical scale.

The majority of delegates felt comfortable with the use of secure on-line feedback forms.

One delegate, a Lecturer, questioned the value of the reporting system.

Some information and advice from NADFAS House is not reaching members and Lecturers. For example, some delegates were unaware that there was a *Lecturers' Report Form for comments on their visits to NADFAS societies*, although it has been mentioned in the Bulletin, is available on the NADFAS website and is discussed at training days.

Discussion Topic 3: Training & Support on Digital Technology

Suggested Discussion Topics:

1. Choice of Equipment
Views from those who have made purchases as to what further practical support or guidance could be offered
Are local suppliers helpful and does the suggested specification assist with purchase?
2. Use of equipment
Provide comments on respective quality of carousel or digitally delivered lectures
What could be done to assist with the issues encountered from use of digital?

Summary of Comments:

The guidance from NADFAS House on digital technology for both Societies and Lecturers was helpful, but now training on the equipment/computer programmes is needed. Training for both Societies and Lecturers was welcomed. For Society members, it was felt that training via the Area structure would be most beneficial and it was suggested that local suppliers could be involved with these training days.

Some Societies were concerned about the cost of digital equipment and questioned whether financial assistance was available for the purchase of a projector/laptop. NADFAS House's assistance on choosing equipment and obtaining a discount would be welcomed.

It was widely recognised that there is a need to keep 35mm slide equipment going for as long as possible. NADFAS House can put Societies in touch with repairers and suppliers of new 35mm slide equipment.

It was important that Societies and Lecturers clarified which party was providing digital equipment prior to lectures, and it would be helpful if Lecturers could speak to projectionists as well as programme secretaries during the planning stages.

Discussion Topic 4: Open Session

Summary of Comments:

Much of the discussion involved widening the membership of NADFAS Societies beyond its current demographic. There is a perceived need to increase NADFAS's profile and to attract younger members. Societies sometimes find it difficult to recruit committee members. One table suggested that NADFAS be renamed.

Lecturers wanted to maintain or increase the level of their bookings. Several at the meeting had found that if they did not promote themselves by speaking onstage at the ADM then bookings for following years were reduced.

A couple of tables commented that Societies received too much paperwork.

More meetings bringing together Society members and Lecturers to discuss issues which affect them both would be welcomed.

ED Summary of the Forum

The meeting was helpful and gave Society members and Lecturers the opportunity to discuss issues which might be considered difficult. It might be useful to hold similar discussion forums more regularly.

ED to summarise the situation regarding fees disclosure and suggest a way forward to the Advisory Council.

The ED will consider making revisions to the booking form (for example, including the nearest train station) in time for the next reprint.

The ED will prepare guidance on the report form grading system.

While there seemed to be an appetite for changing the report form currently in use, there was not a consensus on what the grading system should be. The ED will consider making revisions to the report form, but consultations with both Societies and Lecturers might be needed before changes to the grading system can take place.

The ED will continue to give out guidance and advice via the Bulletin and training days but it might be that such information should be highlighted by the Education Department at New Chairmen's Days as well as Programme Planning training days, in particular guidance regarding the cancellation of bookings. Repeating advice in the Bulletin and Lecturers' mailings more regularly might also be beneficial.

NADFAS House to identify regional suppliers of digital equipment who might offer discounts to NADFAS Societies but who are willing to offer ongoing support where needed.

NADFAS House to introduce training on digital technology for both Societies and Lecturers. Societies represented at the forum seemed keen that this training is organised via the Area structure.

The ED will circulate the document produced by Farnham DFAS detailing for Lecturers the facilities available at their venue together with the dimensions of the hall.

Most of the comments during the Open Session related to membership issues. Delegates were keen that NADFAS build on its 40 years of success and continue to widen its membership.

The Trustee Board and Advisory Council to review this paper.