

GSS Methodology Conference 2005 – Evaluation of Feedback

The 2005 conference was attended by 187 delegates and we received 97 completed evaluation questionnaires (52 per cent). In addition we received some feedback directly from delegates not using the questionnaire. The delegate number is less than the previous years. This is thought to be due to difficulties getting advertising for the conference to GSS departments by the usual methods.

Standard of presentations

Overall feedback was very positive, with 97 per cent of respondents reporting that the conference objectives were achieved.

Of the 21 presentations, 14 recorded 'better than average' ratings from more than 50 per cent of respondents. All papers scored over 75 per cent of responses as 'average or better'. Only three presentations received any lowest (E) ratings and they represented 2 per cent, 3 per cent and 5 per cent of responses for those papers. This confirms that the standard of presentation remains high, a situation we are seeking to maintain and improve.

Discussions, disruptions and timekeeping

There was criticism of the session discussions, mostly referring to lack of time and not being able to ask questions after each presentation. There were also comments that sessions were disturbed as people changed sessions between presentations, while other delegates complained that it was difficult to change sessions between presentations.

The conference syndicate sessions were designed to be 'closed' sessions where delegates would remain throughout the session; discussants would then tie the sessions together and lead discussion of all presentations. This structure does not allow for delegates changing sessions in the middle and it does cause disruption if people chose to do so. The organisers are considering adopting an 'open' session structure next year, where papers across sessions will be synchronised, questions and answers after each presentation, and time built in for changing mid-session.

Over running in some sessions was also reported by several respondents. We already supply guidance notes to chairs which set out their role. But for next year we will be seeking to make their responsibility for keeping presenters to time clearer, to allow time for questions from the floor. We will be supplying chairs with a clear mechanism for time control. Timekeeping will be even more critical if the papers are to be synchronised across sessions.

Error in conference booklet

The order of presentations for one syndicate session was wrongly presented in the conference booklet. This caused problems for those individuals who moved between sessions. This was a failure in proof reading which we will seek to ensure is not repeated.

Pre-conference administration

Criticism was received about the lack of updates of information on the webpage. This was due to a breakdown in communication between the organisers and the web administrators. This has already been addressed and should not be repeated.

However, 95 per cent of respondents rated pre-conference administration positively with 42 per cent giving it the highest score.

Too ONS dominated

This was the most 'ONS dominated' conference for some years, both in terms of participants and delegates. This is a concern which the organisers continuously seek to rectify. New methods of communicating with all GSS departments are being devised to attract more participation from outwith ONS. New methods of stimulating more GSS participation in the organisation of the conference for next year are also being considered. This is a GSS conference and we are all eager to have as wide a GSS representation as possible.

Venue

99 per cent of respondents reported favourably regarding the hotel. We are likely to use this venue again for 2006.

There were problems with cleanliness of one of the Ladies toilets which have been reported to the hotel management and assurances have been received.

This year we left the plenary room free at lunch for use by delegates. While this is expensive the feedback has been so positive that we intend to adopt this for the future.

Catering

While there were individual criticisms 76 per cent rated the catering above average, rising to 94 per cent as average or above.

There was a problem with supplying some special dietary requirement which we are seeking to address.

Location and format of conference

Only 13 responses were made on the subjects of moving from London, changing to two days and delegate charges. There is some support for all of these, but a decision has already been made that 2006 will be a London based, charge free, one day conference.

Specific comments

Over 120 specific comments were received, of these some 72 per cent were critical. Most of these have been addressed above.

All comments are welcome and we strive to improve in all areas.