

EPTA Conference evaluation

To inform the planning of future EPTA conferences, delegates were asked to give their views on the 2002 conference in London and to make suggestions for next year's conference, which will be held in Switzerland. This was done both through the closing discussion at the conference and through an evaluation form.

There was universal agreement amongst those who completed the evaluation form that attendance at the conference was a good use of time, with the opportunities for international networking being particularly valued. The plenary sessions, workshops and the social events all received positive feedback and it seems that it is this mix of activities that makes the conference interesting and enjoyable.

Delegates enjoyed the plenary sessions and commented that the presentations were interesting. Most felt that there needed to be more time put aside for debate and discussion following each presentation. This would allow delegates to actively compare experiences between different countries and institutions, and to explore common points of view. It was suggested that the discussions could be partly structured with, for example, a short prepared response to each presentation.

Delegates were initially offered a choice of five workshops of which only two attracted significant interest and remained in the final programme. Both of these workshops looked at generic issues (public trust and the future) that would be of relevance to much of the work carried out by EPTA members. Some delegates commented that the workshops should further emphasise practical discussions around methods of working, rather than look at topic specific issues. In addition, some said that it was not necessary to have feedback from the workshops to the conference plenary.

There was a small majority in favour of increasing the proportion of time devoted to workshops. This could resolve the clash perceived by some between the priorities and interests of Parliamentarians and of officials at the conference. It was, for example, suggested that Parliamentarians should be allocated time to compare the activities of their respective Committees and offices; and that there should be time set aside for methodological discussion amongst Technology Assessment practitioners.

More generally, it was suggested that there should be a 'shop' at the conference venue where EPTA organisations could present their latest publications; that the conference should be held over 2 rather than 2.5 days to allow more people to take part in the visits; and that there was a need to attract more Parliamentarians to the conference (although it was pointed out that the Parliamentarians were not always easily identified as such).

There was some discussion around the focus for next year's conference. It was suggested that a specific case study, on a topic of interest across EPTA organisations, could be used as the focus for the conference. This case study could form the basis for discussion on issues such as public opinion, political decision-making, impact and methods. Topics that were suggested included research on humans (particularly stem cell research), electronic identification, the role of the media in Technology Assessment and managing privacy (which could be examined with relation to virtual identities and developments in biotechnology such as genetic testing).