CLUK'06 Lessons Learnt

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Future organisers could take note of: we provided a PhD training session by Dr. Marian Petre who is responsible for the research training at the OU. This was found to be very useful by all those who attended.

Here are some of the problems CLUK could learn from:

1. Publicity is key to getting an adequate number of submissions. We had planned for a large number of submissions and posters with a view to accepting 16 papers and 8 posters from the review process. In the event we got only 8 paper submissions and 1 poster. We accepted all of them. Fortunately, they were all acceptable. Although we had originally planned to promote the colloquium using a number of mailing lists in our field, we made the mistake of accepting a suggestion that it was sufficient to email to the CLUK members list. We are not sure why, but what we did was not sufficient and did not get the number of submissions we were expecting.

SO WHERE ELSE TO ADVERTISE—GOT A LIST?

2. Timing of the advertising may also have been wrong – near Christmas vacation.

3. A misunderstanding on our part was that the entire thing was to be organised by students. In fact, the members of the CLUK committee are very keen to review the papers. You should include them in the programme planning and on the committee from the very beginning. |You should also solicit help from senior academic staff in your department. Take all the advice, but do what you think is needed to achieve what you want.

4. We used a conference-like website from a previous conference, thinking that the system was proven and all we were doing was changing some of the content. So, we did not test the website absolutely thoroughly. We encountered some problems in the system as a whole which caused some initial confusion. Everything got sorted out in the end, but it was tricky for a while. You MUST test any system you put into production as if it is completely new.

5. We got an EPSRC grant for the colloquium. This is quite a tedious process for funding which is miniscule in comparison with normal full project funding amounts. But, it is a useful thing to have EPSRC sponsorship, and you should apply at least 6 months ahead. The categories you get funding for are: a) invited speaker's expenses. b) we also got funding towards the costs of webcasting which involved a technician's time. You submit the costs as FECs (Full Economic Costings – your research school financial people will help with those) to the EPSRC. But, remember that you only get 80% of what they say they are awarding, category by category and you can use the money in each category for only the actual expenses in that category. You cannot cross-subsidise. You have to report the actual

expenditure and submit a report afterwards to the EPSRC. In our case, we also have to maintain the webcast archive for 1 year and tell them the statistics on its usage.

Some pointers for CLUK organisers (in no particular order):

- Traditionally CLUK has been held near the beginning of January, just before the beginning of term (at least for most universities). This is generally a good time because there is not much clash with other conferences, and academics are usually free. This does mean that you need to get everything sorted well before Christmas, as most people are away for a couple of weeks around then at least, and it's hard to get anything done then.

- This means you need to get camera-ready copies in at least 2 weeks before Christmas and at least a month before the conference, as you always need to allow for people being late!

- Give your reviewers plenty of time to review (at least 2 weeks) and give yourselves a couple of days at least to make the final decisions about acceptance. This means that you probably want your initial submission deadline at least 3 weeks before the acceptance notification.

- Make sure you send out some initial calls at least a couple of months in advance, and then send plenty of reminders nearer the time. Do send some polite messages to the academics urging them to nag their students to submit something.

- It's a good idea to make a poster and send it out to all the universities with NLP departments (see the CLUK website page listing NLP departments in the UK) advertising the conference (see samples).

- You can apply for an EPSRC grant to assist you with the finances (see samples). You'll need to do this at least 6 months in advance.

- Traditionally we've had 2-3 invited speakers who are well known academics or industrials in the field. It's a good idea to have at least one speaker with a very general talk, rather than focusing on specific talks which will go over many people's heads, as there tends to be quite a broad range of interests.

- Try to keep in contact with a previous organiser who should be able to offer you pointers and advice. One of the roles of a CLUK organiser should be to assist the following year's organiser.

- Make sure you confirm (in plenty of time) with the current CLUK committee (details on the website, and there's a dedicated mailing list cluk-group@dcs.shef.ac.uk) that they are able to review papers. Try to allocate papers for review such that every paper is reviewed by at least one student and one non-student reviewer. One idea could be to

pair student reviewers with the academic reviewers so that they can get a bit of advice from more seasoned reviewers, i.e. so that the academic reviewer can act as a mentor to the student reviewer.

- A poster session is a good way to include more papers and to get students to talk in a more relaxed atmosphere about their work.

- Try to keep the costs down by e.g. offering cheap student accommodation where possible. Some students have difficulty securing funding for conference travel from their departments.

- Try to have a team of 2 or 3 people to organise things - one academic to supervise things and 1 or 2 students to do the work.

- Allow some time in the schedule for a CLUK committee meeting and for general feedback.

I'll send more if I think of anything else!
Diana

Dear Yorick

I have all my material but no real notes - I'm sure I could write up a report of things I learnt but most of it is practical stuff (which might be obvious to more seasoned pros). For example, one thing I did discover is that an effective way to ensure enough paper submissions is to send posters to UK-based colleagues and then ask them to display the posters in the relevant phd lab (and shanghai their students).

Regards
Mark

Dear Yorick, Diana,

I'm sorry but I don't have the email Diana sent to me when I organised CLUK in Edinburgh in 2003. It got lost in the transit to Oxford.

Here are a couple of comments which I usually make when discussing CLUK, which may be of use:

1. we need to somehow encourage the bigger NLP centres to send their students to CLUK (especially Edinburgh, although I believe Sheffield had a poor turnout this year also).

2. one way I believe we could encourage more submissions is to be clear about the status of the CLUK proceedings. For those students who want a published paper to put on their CV then a CLUK paper can still serve that purpose. But my worry has always been that the very best students might not want to submit to CLUK because it might be seen as a waste of a publication that they might get into a conference such as ACL. We should be clear that the purpose of CLUK is to get PhDs together and provide a friendly and supportive environment in which to present work. Having a paper in CLUK shouldn't prevent publication of the same work at ACL.

Best wishes

Steve