

NSF Member Liz Exley writes about her experience of presenting at the NSF conference in June 2004.

When the NSF first asked for a few members to do a presentation at the Annual NSF Conference I hesitated. I had never really done presentations before apart from the odd small-scale one at university. I would never have described myself as bursting with confidence when it came to public speaking. Despite this it happened, a kind of out-of-body experience where I heard myself say, "I'll do it".

Part of me was thinking "you should gain experience in this, it's a very useful skill, you have to do one for your IPDS" and the other part of me was thinking, "do a presentation?.....in front of a hundred students?.....including some from your own college?.....yeah, right."

Fortunately, the braver part of me triumphed. I say fortunately because although it was nerve-wracking and several times I thought it might be nice if I broke my leg and didn't have to do it, it was a very valuable and confidence-boosting experience.

The NSF organised a fantastic presentation skills course to prepare. Part of this involved being filmed whilst making a short presentation. Although this was cringe-worthy it gave me an opportunity to be my own audience and appreciate my own strengths and weaknesses. The whole course emphasised the need to slow down and relax. One of the most useful pieces of advice was that pauses are never as long to the audience as they seem to you! Also, no matter how obvious "remember to breathe" seems, you only appreciate the difference it makes when you see yourself doing it wrong and then right.

On the day of the presentation my two co-presenters and myself were very nervous. I didn't manage one of the delicious muffins beforehand so I really must have had butterflies.

Our presentation was about the NSF; past, present and future. I was to do the future part and went last. Past (Richard Beckett) and present (Alex Wyatt) were brilliant and as I watched from the side of the stage I thought, "there's no way I'm as relaxed as that". Mainly I was concerned with not falling over my feet on the way to the stage.

Finally, it was my turn and it passed in a blur. I remembered to pause and speak slowly (I think). I didn't mess up the slides. I didn't talk to the ground. I didn't trip on my way *back* from the stage. I was so relieved when it was over (momentarily forgetting I would have to do it again the next day) and felt chuffed with myself.

I know there are people who are not fazed by public speaking but I'm not one of them. Despite my fears, I appreciate what a key skill it is and the importance of being able to communicate effectively with audiences of all kinds, in differing situations. I am determined to become better at it.

That is why I can understand CIPFA's decision to include "giving a presentation" as a requirement in the new IPDS. It may seem like a pain at the time, but it forces CIPFA students to face their fears, to discover and work on their own strengths and weaknesses and, most of all, to realise it's not that bad (honest)!

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