Organising events

There are a number of things to consider when holding a local event.

Order of organisation

Think about the order in which you are going to organise things. Make sure you set the date early on and agree the venue - these are the two most important pieces of information from the point of view of your potential audience. When choosing the venue check that it is fully accessible.

Timing

Consider the timing. Which day of the week is likely to be best for potential audience, speakers etc? Make sure that you check that your event doesn't clash with another meeting that might impact on your turnout.

Guest speakers

Make sure that you brief guest speakers thoroughly as to the purpose of the event and what you expect from them. You might also want to ask for a copy of speeches in advance of the day so that you can check that the tone and content is appropriate for the purpose of the event. For example, do you want debate, controversy, show of solidarity? If there appears to be a problem with the speech give speakers plenty of time to make appropriate changes.

Check with your guest speakers' to see if they have any audio-visual needs. Make sure everything is working and available well in advance.

Format

How can information be best delivered to your audience?
■ questions and answers (Q&A)
■ chat-show style
■ speech
■ panel session
■ on-stage interview.

By using a variety of these methods you can help make the event more interesting. Interactive presentations after lunch such as Q&A or on-stage interviews, for instance, are a good way of keeping people alert.

Publicity

Think about how the event can be publicised. Have you invited the press? How will potential delegates get to hear about your event? You may want to produce posters and do a mail shot. Don't forget to send out an email reminder as the date approaches. Is it worth contacting the Education press - Independent (Thursday), Guardian (Tuesday), THES/TES for inclusion in listings? Have you let the UCU press office know the event is taking place? Is it worth putting an announcement in the local press or writing a press release for key journalists? Some publications have a free listings service, alternatively it may be worth paying for an advert.

Length of agenda

Don't put too much on the agenda. Feedback often shows that participants get just as much out of networking and the opportunity to discuss issues informally with one another as they do from the more formal agenda items. Make sure that you allow time for this in your agenda.

Reasons for attending

Consider why people might be interested in coming to your event. Possible reasons might be:
- education
- networking
- debate, discussion
- information
- influence policy.

Cater the event to meet the above requirements

For example, if you are including a Q&A session, why not email delegates to ask for question ideas? Try to get some feedback on the agenda you have in mind, this might persuade you to re-jig the day to more accurately reflect your audience's interests, but remember that you can't always please everyone completely.

Check the venue's terms and conditions before signing a contract

If one or more clauses seem unreasonable; eg forfeiting 90% of the hire cost for cancellations of six months or less, send two copies of a letter back with the signed contract stating that you accept all the terms except 'clause x' and asking them to countersign acceptance of one copy, returnable to you. This will then alter the legal agreement between you and the venue.

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