

Conference Evaluation Report 2011

The 11th International ACTS conference was held at the National Wine Centre in Adelaide, 28 - 30 September. Over 120 delegates from universities, TAFES, government and business attended the event, which also included the Green Gown Awards Australasia awards dinner and presentation ceremony.

While the conference seemed to go well from the perspective of the ACTS Board and conference organisers, the University of Adelaide, it is extremely important for us to understand and gain feedback from those who attended the event to ensure we improve our conference every year.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to respond to our short survey. We have been able to gain some fantastic suggestions to improve for next year. Below is an overview of what you had to say.

Nearly all participants rated the **overall conference experience** as either Excellent (46.5%) or Good (51.2%). Suggestions for improvement are listed below in Table 1, accompanied by an ACTS response.

Table 1: *Suggestions for improving the overall conference*

Suggestion	ACTS response	Will you see it next year?
A prize or award for the organisation/project that proved to be an exemplar of sustainability but did not apply for an award	The ACTS Award of Excellence was introduced for this reason. The Award is based on one organisation or individual recognising the achievements of another institution. The only catch is that the nominated institution needs to be an ACTS member. The basis of the Award is to recognise those who are doing great work, but may not have had the opportunity to nominate themselves for other Green Gown Awards.	Yes definitely
More interactive sessions during breakouts	During this year's conference we offered opportunities for poster displays during breaks, as well as the Meet the Experts session. The difficulty is balancing the need for people to network independently, whilst also assisting by providing a more formal platform for interaction. We also recognise that people just need a break from it all and a chance to get some fresh air.	We will continue to facilitate opportunities for interaction during breaks whilst maintaining the balance with having nothing organised at all.
Starting times could be brought forward	Usually the conference begins about or after lunchtime on the Wednesday, and 9am on the Thursday and Friday. We tried something different this year by starting earlier on the Wednesday,	It's possible the Thursday sessions will start half an hour earlier,

	whilst still allowing time for those flying in that morning to make it to the conference. We also pushed the start time on the Friday back by an hour to allow more time in the morning to get ready and check out of accommodation – especially considering the Awards dinner is the night before. It is unlikely we will commence the conference earlier on the Wednesday or Friday, but we are happy to investigate starting slightly earlier on the Thursday.	but this will depend on the entire conference schedule.
Better process for vetting presentations	It is no easy process in determining who should be offered a place to present. Trying to balance the right mix of offerings, whilst also ensuring that those who present are up to the task is a time consuming process. We do however realise that there was some criticism about a few of the presentations in particular, and also the lecture style of presentation so we will endeavour to address this.	Yes, we will attempt to set up a better process for next years program.
Repeat important sessions	The idea to repeat the offering of some sessions is a valid one. The difficulty is determining what is considered an ‘important’ session, because I’m sure that anyone presenting would feel that their session is important! The other difficulty raised by repeating sessions is ensuring the variety is still available for all – that is, repeating sessions means that we reduce the number of differing presentations available.	This will need further discussion. Repeating sessions is a valid suggestion but will be determined by the overall program.
Reusable signs to guide people where to go	This comment related mainly to the Friday session at the University of Adelaide campus. We accept that navigating an unfamiliar space or place can be confusing. Emailing maps to advise where the venue is usually suffices, but we can address this in future if need be.	Next year we will be at the Brisbane Convention Centre so this is unlikely to be a problem. We will of course email maps as usual, and have information on our website.
Encourage student competitions	This is a great suggestion and one we have already discussed in regards to the Awards dinner. However, we have found that unless our members, or conference attendees are actively	Yes. There will be an arts table centrepiece design competition run

	<p>promoting any student competition or involvement, we are unlikely to reach and significantly impact the student audience. We are also happy to field more suggestions on what type of student competition we should be encouraging.</p>	<p>for the Awards dinner.</p>
<p>Encourage more collaboration between institutions</p>	<p>While a great suggestion, we are not sure what ACTS can do within the time frame of the conference to encourage more collaboration amongst institutions with the exception of advocating such collaboration. We are very happy to receive further suggestions as to how to encourage broader collaboration at the conference itself. We do have our regional directors on board to plan and host regional based events so keep an eye out for these opportunities through enACT.</p>	<p>Dependent of suggestions received.</p>
<p>Provide a platform for teachers, researchers, students to connect with NGOs and companies for active learning</p>	<p>It is difficult to provide this type of platform at a conference, though we are aware of the potential benefits of doing so. We will need to re-assess our conference program to provide such a platform, as well as seriously consider what type of companies and NGOs we would like to connect with. Our sponsors are always great companies to spend time with, as not only do they actively support ACTS and the conference, they are generally doing great work themselves. We would encourage you to spend time talking with them about their sustainability actions and practices as part of active learning.</p>	<p>Serious consideration will be give to this suggestion, so yes, there is a possibility.</p>
<p>Main room at venue not appropriate for workshops as it was too large for engagement</p>	<p>This suggestion is taken on board for future conferences. Part of the reason behind using the plenary room for concurrent sessions was to save money, and hence keep the prices for attending lower. In saying that, the acoustics and set up of this room at the National Wine Centre made it difficult to deliver workshops.</p>	<p>Taken on board for next year.</p>

Most thought the **overall quality of presentations** were Good (67.6%), with 16.2% rating presentations as Excellent. Suggestions for improvement are listed below in Table 2, accompanied by an ACTS response.

Table 2: *Suggestions for improving the program*

Suggestion	ACTS response	Will you see it next year?
More practical initiatives and outcomes focussed sessions/ case studies	When issuing the expression of interest for presenters, we place a high focus on the practicality and interactivity of the session. However, it is difficult to ascertain who will actually deliver on what they say will be a practical and interactive session. There are also times when lecture style presentations add value, particularly if time is allowed at the end for open discussions. Nonetheless, we will give more consideration as to how to ensure that presentations are not pure lecture style and allow for greater interaction amongst delegates.	Yes. We will endeavour to ensure that this is accounted for.
More variation in session length, ensure focus on interactivity when sessions are long	In an attempt to deliver on more interactive sessions we trialled longer sessions for this years conference, for some of the streams. While this style worked where the session was actually interactive, it proved to be ineffective where the sessions were not. We did actually have varying session lengths for the streams but we will continue to work on ensuring the right mix of lengths in sessions.	Yes. We will endeavour to create a different program with varying lengths next year.
More choice of sessions	As for most of our conference programs, we offered three streams of presentations for people to choose from: one focused more on operations; one focused more of learning and teaching; and one focused more on engagement or other combinations of offerings. We do think that the roundtable discussions went well, and from your feedback, you believed so too, so it is likely we will offer this as part of the program next year. We are not sure how else we could offer more choice, as to some degree we are limited by what is submitted, though we are happy to hear further suggestions on this.	Dependent on further suggestions.
More vetting of the presenters	As mentioned above, it is no easy process in determining who should be offered a place to present. Trying to balance the right mix of offerings,	Yes, we will attempt to set up a better process for next

	whilst also ensuring that those who present are up to the task is a time consuming process. We do however realise that we need to give this more consideration and will therefore endeavour to address this.	years program.
Glossary of acronyms	Some people expressed confusion regarding acronyms used throughout presentations. In future we will ask presenters to ensure they clarify any acronyms used, as well as providing a glossary to accompany their presentations when submitted for access after the conference is finished.	Yes. We will endeavour to ensure all presenters submitted a glossary with their presentations.
More roundtable discussions	The roundtable sessions appeared to be well received and we will endeavour to run these sessions again. The actual format of these sessions is to be confirmed, but likely to include some invited facilitators, as well as an opportunity for participants to run such sessions.	Yes. It is highly likely more roundtable discussions will be included in the line up.
Repeats of important sessions	As mentioned above, the idea to repeat the offering of some sessions is a valid one. The difficulty is determining what is considered an 'important' session, because I'm sure that anyone presenting would feel that their session is important! The other difficulty raised by repeating sessions is ensuring the variety is still available for all – that is, repeating sessions means that we reduce the number of differing presentations available.	As also mentioned above, this will need further discussion. Repeating sessions is a valid suggestion but will be determined by the overall program.
More student involvement	This is something we are very keen to pursue. To this end, we did have a brief discussion with Ellen Sandell from AYCC at the end of her presentation at the conference, about working together to deliver a student event in conjunction with the ACTS conference. Ellen seemed interested and asked for us to contact her in the new year. Other than this, we need to utilise your contacts to ascertain what would encourage students to attend.	Yes, we are endeavouring to increase student involvement.
Video recording of sessions	Whilst some parts of some sessions are recorded, not all sessions are fully recorded. The main reason is due to the cost involved in doing this. To keep costs as low as possible, we have tried to involve media students in recording sessions, but with little response. Even	Yes, we will endeavour to make this happen depending on cost and practicality.

	using students though, we still need to hire equipment, which is quite expensive. Our aim has always been to provide a great conference at great value for attendees – which means keeping costs low where possible. There is also the practicality of doing this – will sessions be viewed by many or just a few? In saying this, we are happy to further investigate this option.	
Presentations from other sectors and perhaps others who are not sustainability professionals so that we can learn from them and innovate rather than copying what others in the sector are already doing	A great idea. If there are suggestions for who to approach about being involved in presenting at the conference please let us know.	If we can identify appropriate people then yes, we will incorporate
Presenters should outline what they are covering in the session and have a 5 point summary to give to attendees should they run out of time	Standard presentation etiquette is to provide a basic overview of what the presenter will cover at the beginning, and also a summary of main points at the end. These points can be highlighted in the presenter package.	Yes, this should be a standard part of the sessions.
Less lecture style presentations	As mentioned above, we do try to encourage and focus on interactivity above lecture style presentations. However, at times, a lecture style presentation can be the most appropriate way to deliver content. What we will do in the future is ensure that lecture style presentations, if included in the program, will allow sufficient time for questions and discussions.	We will continue to push for interactive over lecture style presentations.

A high percentage of delegates believed that the **venue and facilities rating** was Excellent (69.4%), while most others believed it was Good (27.8%).

It seems that **registration processes** work well with most rating it as Excellent (66.7%) and the majority of others rating it as Good (30.6%). Suggestions for improvement are listed below in Table 3, accompanied by an ACTS response.

Table 3: Suggestions for improving the registration process

Suggestions	ACTS response	Will you see it next year?
List of delegates disseminated before the start of the conference so others can see who else from their institution/region is attending	Often the list of delegates can change right up until the time of the conference starting. However, most delegates do tend to register by the deadline given, so the list basically remains stable.	Yes. We will send the most up to date delegate list before the conference starts and an up to date list after the conference ends.

Nearly all survey respondents believed that the **level of communication about the conference** was either Excellent (52.8%) or Good (38.9%).

Not surprisingly, 94.4% of participants strongly agree that **sustainable event practices should be adopted** for the conference. 47.2% agreed and 36.1% strongly agreed that the conference was a **good example of sustainable practice**. Suggestions for improvements are listed below in Table 4, accompanied by an ACTS response.

Table 4: *Suggestions to improve the sustainability of the conference*

Suggestion	ACTS comment	Will you see it next year?
Local produce to be used	We will work with the conference venues and caterers to ensure these suggestions are incorporated as much as possible.	Yes, to the best of our ability we will endeavour to meet these suggestions
Ensure Fair Trade is used		
Provide information re where food is from		
Provide information on Green accommodation, taxi sharing/ car pooling	Often there are no real 'green' accommodation choices available. However, most hotels in Australia are attempting to improve water and energy efficiency. Nonetheless, we will endeavour to find the more sustainable places that are nearby to conference venues. Likewise, we will encourage delegates to utilise the delegation list that will be disseminated for taxi sharing/car pooling opportunities.	Yes. We will search for greener accommodation spots and provide the delegation list for transport sharing opportunities.
Turn air conditioning and lights off when not required	As sustainability professionals, it can be frustrating being in a room that obviously doesn't need air conditioning or artificial lighting. Wherever possible we endeavour to work with our host venue to ensure that lighting and thermal comfort systems are as efficient and natural as possible, but often this may be out of our direct control.	We will endeavour to work with the venue host to see what we can do.
Better promote what is being done	A sustainability ethos was included in the back of the delegate pack, as well as in the Green Gown Awards Australasia winners ACTS website. This is standard practice for our conferences and we will continue to promote this to the best of our ability.	Yes. We will ensure that it is clear everything done to ensure sustainable practices are included.
Record all sessions	As mentioned earlier, whilst some parts of some sessions are recorded, not all sessions are fully recorded. The main reason is due to the cost involved in doing this. To keep costs as low as possible, we have tried to involve media students in recording	Yes, we will endeavour to make this happen depending on cost and practicality.

	<p>sessions, but with little response. Even using students though, we still need to hire equipment, which is quite expensive. Our aim has always been to provide a great conference at great value for attendees – which means keeping costs low where possible. There is also the practicality of doing this – will sessions be viewed by many or just a few? In saying this, we are happy to further investigate this option.</p>	
<p>Video link in for international/interstate speakers</p>	<p>Presenting by video for our international or interstate key note speakers is always offered, though we generally find that our keynotes prefer to be there in person. We have also tried to accommodate any presenter requests to video conference in for their session. To date this has only happened at one or two of our past conferences. And yes, we did experience difficulties during the transmission. Regardless, we will continue to offer this option should key notes or presenters prefer.</p>	<p>Yes, if requested we will endeavour to accommodate.</p>
<p>Video link for interstate attendees who cannot make the conference</p>	<p>In the past, we have attempted to video link some sessions for those unable to make the conference in person (last year’s conference in Melbourne for example). These have not been very well received or requested as most people generally attend the conference. This option is something that requires more thought and discussion.</p>	<p>It’s a possibility depending on the venue ability to accommodate and the number of people who will video in.</p>
<p>Carbon offset for flights</p>	<p>One of our continual sponsors, Climate Friendly, offsets the carbon generated from our event. This includes flights for delegates travelling from other areas.</p>	<p>Yes. Climate Friendly has been supporting ACTS for a number of years.</p>