

GUIDELINES FOR ORGANIZERS

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INTRODUCTION

There has never been a list of formal rules for organising EGAS Conferences, and it would probably not be a good idea to have one. For one thing, what is practicable for one local organiser may be impossible for another. Furthermore rigid regulations are quite opposed to the spirit of EGAS, which has always been ready to try new ideas. The way in which Meetings have been organised in the recent past has generally been along the following lines. A local Committee is set up about two years before the date the Meeting is due to be held. Usually at least one or two members of the Committee will have attended EGAS Meetings and therefore know the general style. A member of the Committee attends EGAS Board meetings for 18 months before the Conference itself and the arrangements for the Conference are fully discussed on these occasions. In particular, any new ideas, departures from normal procedures and so on are considered at these Board meetings, taking into account the Board's experience of previous Conferences and any decisions made by the General Assembly which relate to the points under discussion. The Board meets three times a year, twice during the annual Conference and once in November. It is bound by decisions made at the General Assembly; which is held once a year, during the Conference.

In this way, the Board is kept informed of the progress of the preparations for the Conference, and the local Committee in turn receives advice and help from the Board. On the whole, this system has worked very well, and there is no suggestion that it should be changed. However, there are some

points which the Board considers would be worth circulating to prospective Conference organisers. These relate to customs and practices that have developed over the years. In some cases they concern time-tabling requirements (e.g., a period has to be aside for the General Assembly); in others there are considerations of Conference format on which the General Assembly has expressed definite views which must be respected as far as possible. It is felt that some time and effort may be saved if local organisers, particularly those less familiar with EGAS Meetings, have this information available at the outset. However, this should in no way inhibit an organiser from bringing to the Board new suggestions which run counter to the guidelines, if he sees good reason. Correspondingly, the Board will review and update these guidelines at its November meetings. If at any time there is any point about which advice is needed, then the Secretary will be glad to help.

1. THE BASICS

EGAS stands for European Group for Atomic Spectroscopy. The Conference, generally held once a year, is intended to fulfil two main functions.

i.- To maintain regular contact between groups and individuals from different countries working in atomic spectroscopy and related fields, keeping them in touch with recent research progress.

ii.- To ensure that these contacts continue to develop by providing a Conference that is geared to the needs of younger physicists, particularly graduate students. Specifically, it is to give them the opportunity to meet; to present their ideas and results in an international arena; to take part in formal and informal discussions; and to listen to review papers, appropriate to their level of experience, delivered by acknowledged experts.

iii.- EGAS should encourage the participation of related organisations. To achieve these aims, the Conference must be scientifically first-class, and must be attractive to young research workers as well as senior people. This in turn means organisation on a simple scale, with the Conference fee and living expenses as low as possible. There has been a rich variety in EGAS Meetings over the years. Atomic spectroscopy has evolved enormously during the last decade or so, while the Conferences have been held in many different settings, and each has had a style of its own. Nevertheless, the priority given to the aims set out above has led to common features, which are worth repeating - high scientific quality, minimum cost, and participation by many young people as well as their senior colleagues. To these we should add the characteristics which have grown up through the regular contact of a like-minded group of friendly people: informality, flexibility and good fellowship. These principles form the point of departure for the following sections. The guidelines given are obviously not exhaustive; they concentrate on those points which are more or less specific to EGAS Meetings.

2. VENUES AND DATES

These are chosen by the General Assembly, nowadays at least two years before the Conference is due to be held. In practice, the Board assists the procedure by sounding out Atomic Spectroscopy Groups working in Europe to find possible locations. The General Assembly is then invited to choose between alternatives, or, more usually, to approve the Board's recommendation. However, it is quite entitled not to do so. A similar situation exists concerning the date. EGAS Conferences have always been held Tuesday to Friday inclusive, traditionally during the second week in July, and there is much to be said for having a well-established date. Nevertheless, for some nationalities this time is not entirely convenient, and there may be other factors in a given year; for example, the General Assembly has specifically voted that it would prefer a Conference with student accommodation to one making use of hotels, even if this meant departing from the traditional date. Clashes with

conferences organised by other bodies have also to be considered. In practice, the prospective organiser puts before the Generally Assembly the alternatives which he feels can be managed, given his local conditions, and a date is then chosen which represents the best compromise. The venue, date and organiser should be published in journals such as EPS News, Physics World and Physics Today as quickly as possible, so that organisers of other conferences can avoid clashes. It should also appear in World Wide Web listings. The EGAS Secretary will help coordinate publicity with the organisers.

3. FINANCE

Unfortunately, EGAS has no funds of its own. As a section of EPS, it has technically some claim for financial help if a conference makes a loss due to unforeseen circumstances, but on the whole the responsibility lies with the local Committee to make the Conference self-supporting, to find money where it can, to organise economically, and to work to a tight budget. Some money can often be raised from the State, from the EU, from learned societies, or from industry (either by having an exhibition or sometimes merely putting an acknowledgement in the handbook). However, the bulk has usually to be obtained from the participants themselves.

To keep the fee down to a minimum it is normally used to cover only the essential expenditure - circulars, mailing costs, the handbook, hire of lecture theatres, and so on. Such items as the Conference Dinner, sight-seeing tours, etc., are paid for separately as optional extras, so that participants with very little money are not obliged to pay for things they cannot afford. Despite this, it is generally possible to find enough funds from somewhere to organise an inexpensive reception or other activity of some kind to which everyone, including families, can go.

The various ways of keeping costs down are fairly obvious - graduate students, colleagues and families are often a source of cheap and enthusiastic labour. Some Universities allow the use of lecture theatres, typists, and copying facilities free, or for a nominal charge, when the character of the Conference is explained to them. Invited speakers can be asked to finance themselves from other sources where possible, and there is generally enough choice within Europe to avoid the need to pay fares from far-flung corners of the earth.

One comforting note; the number of paying participants at EGAS Meetings has been remarkably stable over the years, at between 200 and 300, making costing and other arrangements more straightforward than would be the case with a less-well established event.

In raising finance organisers should bear in mind the need to be able to make grants to help some delegates attend the conference. There will always be deserving recipients who cannot raise enough finance from other sources.

4. ACCOMMODATION, FOOD, LECTURE, THEATRES

Arrangements for these needs to be considered long in advance, as bookings may be needed more than a year ahead of time.

The General Assembly has expressed very strongly the view that "on-site" accommodation (i.e., in student residences) is to be preferred to hotels wherever possible, in that even if it is less luxurious, it is cheaper, more convenient, and leads to much greater scientific and social contact. Anyone who wishes to opt for a hotel is of course then at liberty to do so. Where student accommodation is not available, it is necessary to ensure that the local hotels are prepared to carry the load, and adequate information, notice and advice must be given to intending participants. Many cities now have some

form of Conventions Bureau, or Tourist Office, to help with hotel bookings. Transport may also have to be provided to and from hotels, if large distances are involved.

Information about local camping sites should be included in the second circular, because some participants use this as a way of keeping costs down.

As regards meals, student facilities are again generally the most satisfactory solution where possible. But however the catering is done, it is essential to check that the system can cope with over 200 people simultaneously requiring the same meal (the same considerations apply to the serving of coffee in breaks between sessions). Remember also that many participants will need a meal on the Monday evening.

Two main lecture theatres will be needed; one must be able to hold all the participants (say 250-300, to be safe), for plenary sessions; the other should take at least 150 for the occasions when parallel sessions are run. The theatres should be sufficiently close together for people to be able to move from one parallel session to the other without undue inconvenience. If Poster Sessions are to be held, a further room (or possibly corridor) is required, the size depending on the number of contributions. Ideally plenty of free space for circulation should be available. Coffee or tea should be provided between sessions, again not too far from the lecture theatres.

It is also convenient if there is somewhere close by where people can sit and talk while sessions are in progress.

5. INVITED SPEAKERS

There are usually around six invited papers, each scheduled for between 45 minutes and an hour, and each is designed to cover some aspect of atomic spectroscopy, or a related topic, at a level accessible to a graduate student not working in that specialised field. The high quality of these talks has always been a major feature of EGAS Meetings, and they are about as important to the success of a Conference as the catering arrangements. They are also the only direct way in which the EGAS Board and the local Committee can influence the scientific content of the Meeting. Three criteria are appropriate in choosing a speaker : is the subject interesting and topical ? Can the speaker give a good talk in English ? Will the talk be pitched at the right level? The last is a major consideration.

While the Board generally discusses possible speakers with the representative of the local Committee, the time-scale is such that the local Committee takes most of the decisions. First, it is desirable to book speakers early, because they are often in demand for other Meetings. Secondly, because of refusals, the local Committee often has to reconsider whom to ask as a replacement in order to maintain a reasonable balance of subjects. When writing to an invited speaker, it is vital to make it clear from the outset the level of talk required.

The invited speakers must be asked to start their lecture with a tutorial overview of the field, appropriate as an introduction for the many non-specialists and young scientists starting in the field of atomic spectroscopy. We should never forget that participation of these young people has always been a main goal of EGAS.

It is also a good idea to stress the need to keep costs down and to ask if they can recoup expenses elsewhere, as mentioned under Finance above.

6. CIRCULARS

There are normally three circulars sent out before an EGAS Meeting. 1 and 2 are sent to the entire EGAS mailing lists (containing over 500 names), which is maintained and updated by the secretary. The third circular is sent only to those who expressed a definite intention to attend. Note that for 1 and 2 it is possible to save postage by sending a package of named circulars to laboratories where there are several people to be reached, although most organisers have not considered this worth the effort.

It is normal for circulars 1 and 2 to be sent also by electronic mail to all members recorded on the EGAS server. Details of the conference and copies of the circulars should also be placed on World Wide Web pages.

Notes on the circulars follow; however, it is a good idea to look through those sent out for previous EGAS Meetings (the Secretary has copies).

CIRCULAR No. 1, sent about 8 or 9 months before the Conference, gives whatever details are available at the time, including when the later circulars can be expected and if possible approximate deadlines for the booking of accommodation and submission of abstracts. It asks for the return of a "tear-off" slip of paper to indicate interest. It might appear that the circular is of little use to anyone, and the tear-off slip even less so as everyone knows he will get the second circular whether he replies or not. However, the first circular does bring the name and address of the organiser to everyone's attention, and removes any doubts about the Conference date. There is also some psychological value in reminding people to put the Conference date in their diaries and start thinking about how to coordinate it with their family holidays.

CIRCULAR No. 2 asks for a definite commitment to attend; it is sent out around 4 months before the Conference. It gives specific information concerning food and accommodation - alternatives, their cost, and any other relevant factors - and sets a firm deadline for booking (generally by means of a tear-off slip). The Conference fee and the cost and nature of any other activities are stated. Instructions for the preparation of abstracts are given (note that it is particularly important that the presenter of each contribution should be underlined in the list of authors), and a deadline is set for their receipt. (The type of presentation required may also need to be asked - see under "Poster Sessions"). Organisers will need to set deadlines according to their local circumstances, but they should note that the General Assembly has always been in favour of as late a date as possible for submission of abstracts. The proposed deadline should be discussed with the EGAS Board well in advance of the Conference to avoid any possible misunderstanding. However, in setting deadlines it should be remembered that:-

- i.- on the whole, a deadline is the time when people start to do something rather than finish
- ii.- people vary considerably in what they mean by "firm booking" and "definite commitment". Some flexibility at the last minute will be found essential.

In summary, the second circular must be designed so that the organisers can find out from the tear-off slips and abstracts, which are returned to them, all that they need to know to put together the scientific programme and to make arrangements to lodge and feed the participants.

CIRCULAR No. 3, sent within a few weeks of the Meeting, gives whatever final information may be needed. Maps, how to find the Conference Office, lecture theatres, halls of residence, restaurant; hours of opening of Conference Office and restaurant; method of booking in, scientific programme, details of other activities, and so on. With the third circular one can also invite chosen people to be

session chairmen, and so on. It is also possible to include a passage prepared by the EGAS Secretary relating the business of the General Assembly.

In this circular it is particularly important to give clear instructions for travelling to the conference venue. Arriving in a strange city can be stressful! Please remember that a public transport system that is perfectly clear to local people may be completely obscure to a stranger with little knowledge of the local language and customs.

7. SYMPOSIUM

A recent development in EGAS conferences is the holding of a Symposium on a particular topic contained within the conference. A topic is chosen (such as "Spectroscopy and Environmental Applications") and the speakers on one day of the conference are all associated with this topic. Normally two members of the EGAS Board are designated to organise the symposium. One motive for holding such a symposium is to enhance the possibility of obtaining some commercial sponsorship for the conference by making the topic of direct relevance to an application of spectroscopy or lasers.

Proposals for holding a symposium should be discussed at an early stage with the EGAS Board.

8. CONTRIBUTED PAPERS

The General Assembly has expressed the following views :

- i.- There is to be no refereeing system - any paper submitted is to be accepted.
- ii.- A maximum of two parallel sessions is acceptable. Of course the two subject areas should be as remote from one another as possible. Moreover, the popularity of poster sessions seems to have virtually eliminated the need for parallel sessions.

Many people prefer to give their papers as posters, and it is normal to ask in the second circular for a preference as between oral and poster presentation. Official acceptance of contributed papers, and the handbook itself, should not distinguish between oral and poster presentation in case this should affect claims for expenses. However, since different preparation is required it is, of course, essential to inform contributors in good time which option they are getting.

In principle only one poster or oral contribution should be accepted per participant. Collaborating authors can have more contributions between them, but for each contribution a different participant shall count. In case that even in this way the number of contributions tends to become too large, the organisers could contact some of the larger laboratories to ask them to lower the number of contributions, but they shall not require them to do so.

a. Poster sessions

- i.- Contributors must be notified well in advance of the area (normally about 2m²) and facilities available. The organisers should also give some prescriptions for the posters : they should be legible from a distance of about two meters, so the letters should have a minimum size of 8mm for lower case and 12mm for upper case. The figures should equally comply with these rules. Further information can be made available for those really interested in details in another way, e.g. as

photocopies distributed at the posters. If there are any special instructions for mounting posters, then these must be made known to participants well in advance.

ii.- A plan of "who is where" must be available to conference participants.

iii.- The length of time a Poster Session should last depends on the number of contributors, but should be a minimum of two hours. This may well include a coffee break if poster and coffee areas are reasonably close. The Poster area should be as central as possible. Poster and oral sessions should not run in parallel.

iv.- Time for mounting and dismantling posters outside other scheduled activities must be allowed. If there is more than one poster session, the first presenters must be given a deadline for clearing the area for their successors. Subject to this limitation, posters should be left up as long as possible - preferably at least 24 hours.

v.- The problem of both standing by one's own poster and looking at others in the same session is probably best solved by affixing a time-table to each poster showing when the author will actually be available for discussion.

b. Oral sessions

The General Assembly has expressed the following views :

i.- Insofar as is possible the author's preference for oral or poster presentation will be followed, but the local committee should be free to transfer a few papers to poster sessions rather than run an additional parallel session.

ii.- All papers delivered orally shall be allotted a minimum of 15 minutes (12 minutes for presentation, 3 for discussion).

iii.- The organisers may wish to advise institutes to require their younger speakers (and some of the older ones as well, if necessary) to hold some trial talks to ensure a proper presentation.

iv.- It is desirable to have some contributed papers given in plenary sessions; these may be allotted a longer time, say 20 or 25 minutes. The selection is made by the local Committee, and the presenters must be informed well before the Conference.

c. Parallel sessions

A maximum of two parallel sessions is acceptable. It is as well for a Conference Organiser to be aware of the problems associated with parallel sessions, even though there may be little he can do about them. They all arise from the fact that some people will want to listen to papers in both sessions. The most serious drawback of parallel sessions is thus that participants may be forced to miss papers which they would have found interesting. The golden rule is therefore to make the two subject areas as orthogonal as possible when planning the program. This has the added advantage of reducing the flow of participants backwards and forwards between the lecture rooms. Such movement causes more or less inconveniences depending on the type of seating, the positions of doors, the acoustics, and when people choose to move.

Practically, the only factor for the Conference organiser has under his control is the amount of information people have in deciding when to move. There is a good case for keeping each session informed about the progress of the other. The papers are numbered in the handbook; the numbers of the papers being presented at any instant in both sessions could be displayed at all times in both

lecture theatres. This information should also be available in the coffee area. Closed circuit television, or a computer link, could easily be used.

The advantages of such a system are that unnecessary journeys would be avoided (and hence the inconvenience to others), and that people would not miss the paper they wished to hear (or arrive half an hour too early for them), so reducing frustration. The disadvantage is the danger of a mass stampede from one lecture theatre to another when a popular paper is about to begin, so that some unfortunate speaker loses most of his audience in a noisy exodus. This does not happen if people are unaware of the progress of the other session since they generally leave at the end of a contribution. However, in this case the discussion of a paper, which can bring up important points, tends to be disrupted.

A major factor in the success of parallel sessions is the choice of chairman. Much more than in plenary sessions, it is important that they should be capable of exercising some control over the speakers and audience, prompting discussions, and coping with unforeseen problems. However, one cannot expect most chairmen to try to prevent people from going in and out during talks or discussion; in any case, such appeals (though usually greeted with noisy approval) have only a limited and short-term effect. Finally, it is quite unrealistic to rely on being able to keep two parallel sessions "in phase". However strongly they are urged, some contributors will not keep to their allotted time and most chairmen will not force them to do so.

9. TIMETABLE

Participants tend to arrive on Monday afternoon and evening, and sessions begin early on Tuesday morning. It has become a well received tradition to have a welcome party at some time on Monday late afternoon/evening. Typically, there may be a formal reception before dinner on Tuesday evening. Half or all of Wednesday or Thursday afternoon may be devoted to laboratory visits or an outing. On Thursday evening there is a Conference dinner. On Monday at about 17.00 and on Friday at lunch time, a separate room for EGAS Board meetings is needed; the Board discusses its business over a simple lunch, often sandwiches and beer. At some time in between these Board meetings, a period of at least an hour must be set aside for the General Assembly. To ensure a high attendance, it has been found useful to have this immediately following a plenary session on Wednesday or Thursday. At the Assembly, new Board members are elected, and the Board seeks direction from the EGAS membership on various issues. Thus, when the new Board meets at Friday lunch time, it can discuss its affairs taking into account the opinions of the General Assembly.

The placing of the invited papers through the week is a matter for the local Committee; however, it is a good idea to have a really popular speaker on Friday afternoon to retard the evaporation of participants.

In the light of the above, when the local Committee has copies of the abstracts, and knows which are to be presented orally and which by posters, it draws up a scientific programme as follows. First, it allows for the time needed for Poster Sessions, any Symposium, General Assembly, and Invited Speakers to find how much time is available for oral contributed papers. It then deploys this time by (a) allocating most of the papers to parallel sessions, each session having the same theme as far as possible (b) using up whatever time remains by making a selection of papers to be presented in plenary sessions.

10.MISCELLANEOUS

This section contains odd tips which various organisers have found to be useful.

- i.- Make provision for delegates arriving late. Trains and planes are sometimes delayed! If people arrive late, can they gain access to their accommodation? This can sometimes be a problem with student hostels especially.
- ii.- The more local people, particularly graduate students, who are around to help participants, the better. They can be distinguished by having a differently coloured badge. In particular, it is advisable to have at least one such person who is familiar with the technical aspects of any visual aids and microphones. In any lecture theatre where a session is in progress, there should be a member of the local committee present in addition to a technician. Ensure that the theatres are unlocked well ahead of a session commencing.
- iii.- Local organisers should check very carefully for themselves that all necessary audio-visual aids are working properly: do not trust technical personnel to have done this. Check the placing of projectors and screens for good clear views. This is especially important if the conference is not being held in the organiser's own Physics theatres. Always have a spare overhead projector in each lecture theatre. If radio microphones are to be used, then make sure that they are in good working order: intermittent faults are very common. These are irritating to the audience and upset the speaker's nerves!
- iv.- The Conference Dinner. The General Assembly has expressed the view that this should be informal and reasonably inexpensive, to encourage young people to come. After the dinner, there is sometimes a sing-song session, and this should be taken into account in the planning. Sometimes the venue for the dinner is some distance from the conference site. In this case make sure that you have adequate transport available for everyone.

11.DEALING WITH THE EUROPEAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY

EGAS is linked to the European Physical Society through its Atomic and Molecular Physics Division. EGAS is always represented on the AMPD Board. Conference organisers must conform with certain procedures to assure that EGAS conferences are officially recognised as EPS meetings. Any applications for support funding to the EU, for example, will need EPS backing. The rules are in a constant state of change, so that organisers should talk to the EGAS Board at an early stage to ensure that benefits of our membership of this wider body are not lost. Keep in close touch with the Secretary and the Chairman of the Board over these matters.