

Principles of Playful Conference Design

This document details the design decisions that were made when designing the Playful Learning conference. While the focus of that conference is explicitly on play, these principles can be applied to the design of any conference or event.

Rethinking Conference Design

Playful Conference Design is about questioning why we do what we do, whether it adds value, and how we might do it better.

1. Critically review each of the elements of a traditional conference to consider what will work in the context of your conference, and what could be done in alternative, more engaging ways.
2. Consider what additional activities could be added to provide opportunities to play and network by giving people the opportunities to try new things, step out of their comfort zones, and take risks in a safe space.
3. Develop playful and diverse ways of gaining actionable feedback throughout and after the conference.
4. Accepting that any conference can never be perfect, particularly when innovating, and be open to learning from mistakes and iteratively developing by working with the community.

Designing for Inclusive Play

Ensuring that we understand the different ways in which people play and engage with each other is key to making conferences inclusive for all.

5. Strive to ensure representation from under-represented groups and a diversity of backgrounds and characteristics in the conference and on committees; have a named inclusivity champion.
6. Provide choice of activities, including quiet break-out spaces, and alternative ways of taking part (e.g. spectating rather than playing).
7. Prompt and guide presenters to think about inclusivity in their sessions and to design their sessions for flexible participation.
8. Use online and in-person formats as appropriate to be as inclusive as possible, ensuring that activity design is appropriate for the mode.

Enacting the Five Principles of Playful Conferences

Considering how to enact the founding principles of the playful learning conference.

Collegiality

9. Offering mentoring for new contributors to support the academic writing process.
10. Encouraging a supportive critical scholarly community, where this is space for debate, but grandstanding or academic one-upmanship is not tolerated.
11. Providing a range of different opportunities to network, with space and time to talk to each other about the sessions and gather difference perspectives.

Innovation

12. Explicitly supporting new ideas, formats, and types of contribution, accepting that not all may be successful.

13. Support and highlight the importance of failure in all aspects of the conference.
14. Ensure evolution of ideas and ownership, as well as sustainability, by creating explicit models for handing over chairing and committee responsibilities.

Integrity

15. Conferences are designed to break-even rather than be profit-making to make them as affordable and accessible as possible, offering subsidised options (e.g. students).
16. Conferences do not accept sponsorship from vendors or offer preferential treatment to any speakers or delegates.
17. Being fair, ethical, inclusive, and open in all conference procedures and policies.
18. Conferences are as sustainable as possible (e.g. all food vegetarian, conscious reduction of handouts and waste).

Mischief

19. Consciously providing an environment in which it is okay for delegates to be silly and have fun (in which it is also okay for delegates to choose not to be).
20. Striving to create a feeling of freedom for conference committee and delegates so that they feel confident to safely step out of their comfort zones, being allowed to make suggestions and run with ideas.

Rigour

21. Accepting contributions only when they meet high standards of academic quality, including the incorporation of critique or new knowledge creation within the session delivery, as well as being presented in an engaging way, moving away from presentation of findings towards collaborative scholarship.
22. Supporting contributors to achieve high levels of quality and research engagement through mentorship and support.
23. Providing transparency in decision-making regarding submission criteria and quality.