Event Decision Tree for the Royal Microscopical Society (RMS)

The Royal Microscopical Society is dedicated to the promotion and development of microscopy and imaging. It is a vibrant society offering its members opportunities to network and to play an active part in the world of science. Based at our St Clements Office are a dedicated Events team who have for many years helped to plan, organise and deliver many events for the benefit of both members and non-members.

Following a recent change to our policy, and as a result of the effects of a drop in our income from the Journal of Microscopy due to Open Access publishing, we now need to ensure that the events we deliver at least meet the operating costs. We have instigated a 'Decision Tree' to assist us when assessing the viability of an event.

Below we have a summary of the 'Decision Tree' process, and what we take into consideration when assessing an event. If you have any questions after reading this document, please contact our Event Director, Victoria Masters.

The Decision Tree

When will the event take place?

The RMS calendar is busier at certain times of the year.

For example, July and September due to regular courses being held during this time frame. This doesn't mean we won't have capacity for your event, but we need to consider staffing resources, before agreeing to dates.

Large events.

If we have committed to a large event already, like mmc, it will impact on whether we can host your large event as well. We may ask if the timing can be adjusted to make both events possible.

It is also worth considering the time of year and the type of event you wish to host.

Collecting abstracts and compiling a programme can be difficult for a September event for example, due to the summer break and people's availability. Again, it doesn't mean we can't do it, but we need to consider the impact this will have.

How much lead-time will you be offering?

Ideally, we would always like to have 12 months+ lead time for an event, but we know this isn't always possible. The lead time required will depend on the length, complexity and size of the proposed event. For example, an online event, can if necessary be put together at a few weeks' notice. We wouldn't necessarily advise it, but it can be done. For a conference with an associated exhibition, the biggest challenge will be availability of venues, hence needing a longer lead time to secure the right venue at the right price.

How long will the event be?

The length of the event will ultimately impact the registration costs for attendees. We are aware of restricted budgets so at this time are recommending serious consideration be given to holding a 1-2 day event, rather than a 3-5 day event.

Where is it?

Attendance at events will be affected by location and we are mindful more than ever of academic institutions placing travel bans on employees. The team at St Clements will work with you to determine the best location or how to make the best of a chosen location.

Where is the audience?

Is there an existing audience for your event? Is it international or UK based? We have to be realistic on attendance to avoid surplus venue charges and make sure we reach the required number of abstract submissions and/or registrations.

How many speakers will you be inviting?

The more speakers you invite the greater the cost to the event budget. Speakers are typically offered free registration but may also be given free accommodation and contribution to travel costs. The RMS usually sets limits for contributions to travel costs as follows: UK £300, EU £450, Res of the world £800. There is flexibility here if additional funding can be secured.

What external funding will be available?

If you are able to secure additional funding from grants, bursaries or funding bodies, this will help us to keep the registration fees lower or enable us to offer student bursaries. It may make the difference between a balanced budget or the event not taking place. It is not essential to have this, but it is very helpful.

Cost of venue

With rising costs and inflation, the Events sector faces extreme challenges in sourcing venues that provide what is needed. Do you have access to any 'free' options within your institution that could be used instead of paying external venues?

Will the event be attractive for sponsors?

We are aware more than ever that our valued sponsors need to demonstrate the worth of attending events to their organisations. If we can offer networking time, techno bite presentations and visible sponsorship opportunities, this helps to secure this essential commercial support.

RMS Team Capacity

As previously mentioned, certain times of year are busier than others, and consideration needs to be given to what capacity there is in the office so that we can plan for the event activities and be proactively able to cover any team absences.

Can the RMS meet the expectations?

Wherever possible the RMS Team want to be able to meet or exceed your expectations for your event. However, part of our role is to ensure we do our due diligence financially and also that we communicate effectively with you if we think there will be any shortfall of expectation. This usually arises around anticipated registration fees which often need to be higher than the organiser would prefer.

Working together

We are committed to working with our scientific organisers to run their events as successfully as possible. We understand that there will need to be compromise and management of expectations on both sides and commit to open and honest communication throughout the process to ensure we deliver the event that you want.

What comes next?

If we agree that your event has satisfied the requirements of the Decision Tree, it will then be sent to the Honorary Secretaries for Biological and Physical Sciences; Professor Maddy Parsons and Professor Andy Brown who now approve all event requests. You will then be assigned a member of the team to work with you. An agreement will be issued between the RMS and the scientific organiser to ensure clarity of roles and expectations.

Hopefully this document has explained our decision-making process and answered any questions that you may have. If you still have questions, please contact Victoria Masters.

Thank you for coming to the RMS with your proposed event. We look forward to working with you.