(Conference issues)
The challenges of organising a conference for everyone

<u>Difficulties of first time attendees</u>
The Trustees always felt that the CM conference was a very friendly event but there was feedback that people attending for the first time found it a very daunting prospect since everyone else seemed to know each other. A number of initiatives have been instigated over the years:-

- Different coloured Lanyards to indicate trustees (red) previous attendees (black) and first timers (blue) to encourage people to look out for first timers, to chat to them, include them in groups and point them in the right direction if they were looking lost.

- Free drinks in the exhibition on the first evening after the AGM to encourage people to meet and chat

- A quiz on the first evening to get people chatting informally as well as attempting to answer impossible questions!

- Invitation to a drinks reception ahead of the conference dinner.

<u>Time for lunch and the exhibition</u>
This was initially a problem when the conference was held in Lancaster and delegates had to walk the length of the campus from the conference centre to the hall of residence for lunch. A sandwich lunch was provided at the conference centre so people did not have the long walk and could spend more time in the exhibition. Fair weather during the conference is great for delegates though not for exhibitors who don't like it when the sun is shining and delegates take their lunch outdoors!

<u>Support for people who use AAC</u>
Particularly when the conference was at Lancaster, some of the enablers of AAC users found it particularly hard to push the wheelchairs to the conference centre, back and forward again at lunch time and then back again in the evening, given that the conference centre and the halls of residence were at opposite ends of the campus. The concept of the orange shirts was introduced and usually "manned" by support staff from Valence School who wore orange T-shirts and were available to help or advise on support issues. When the conference moved to Leeds in 2012 Conference Makers were introduced. Six second year Speech and Language Therapy Students took over the support role from the Valence team. Wearing CM T-shirts they were clearly visible to all delegates who need help or directions. In 2015 Trustees were provided with bright yellow polo shirts ensuring that they too were visible to delegates requiring help.

An on-going problem is the availability of table and chair areas for people with disabilities to sit to eat their lunches – where tables are provided other non-disabled conference delegates tend to sit at them to chat.

<u>The amount of work</u>

The organisation of the conference requires an enormous amount of work which was originally carried out solely by trustees and subsequently with additional support from the administrator, Patrick Poon. Over time more people were drafted in for specific jobs:-

- Reading and selecting conference papers
- Chairing all sessions at the conference
- Managing the exhibition
- Registering arrivals on the day and handing out conference documentation etc (carried out by the Newcastle CAC team for many years until their demise)
- When the conference moved to Leeds many tasks previously carried out by the administrator and trustees were taken on by the 'Meet in Leeds' team. They pack the conference bags, man registration, act as guides around the campus and reduce the pressure on Trustees.
- In 2016 an online software package – Ex Ordo – has been introduced. This allows delegates to register online and presenters to submit their abstracts in the same way.