INSIGHTS FROM THREE YEARS OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT OPHTHALMOLOGY CONFERENCE

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The ROYAL COLLEGE of OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

NSOC The National Student Ophthalmology Conference

INTRODUCTION

The shift to virtual medical conferences during the COVID-19 pandemic offered opportunities to engage broader audiences whilst overcoming geographic and logistical barriers. However, studies focused on the value of virtual ophthalmology conferences remain limited.

This retrospective review analyses feedback from the **National Student Ophthalmology Conference** (**NSOC**) 2022-2024 identifying factors influencing the value of virtual ophthalmology conferences and informing future research.

METHODOLOGY

The NSOCs were aimed at UK medical students but were attended by healthcare professionals internationally. Data from attendee feedback across all NSOCs was reviewed. Each of the three conferences were hosted virtually, on Zoom or MedAll, but structured similarly to an in-person event featuring expert guest lectures, poster/presentation competitions and in 2024, a virtual surgical skills workshop.

Post-conference questionnaires collected feedback, with response rates of 46% (n=58) in 2022, 64% (n=103) in 2023, and 50% (n=125) in 2024. Quantitative data from 5-point Likert scales underwent statistical analysis, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data.

RESULTS

Across the three years, all attendees rated the NSOCs positively. The conference content was rated positively, increasing in "excellent" from 60% to 63% in 2022 to 2024. Similarly, the academic standard perceived as "excellent" increased from 70% to 75% [**Figure 1**]. The majority of attendees agreed that the 2023 conference provided better insights into the speciality (76%) and increased interest in ophthalmology (72%).

Regarding the virtual setting, overall, there was high satisfaction, with 100% "excellent" or "good" ratings in 2022 and 2024, and 76% "excellent", "good" or "neutral" in 2023 [**Figure 2**]. In 2023, 55% of attendees strongly agreed the conference enhanced their understanding of ophthalmology.

The thematic analysis highlighted three consistent themes: multifaceted benefits for attendees, good organisation and online platform efficacy.

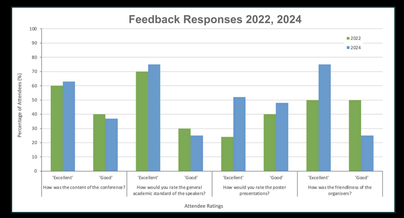


Figure 1: Feedback responses from attendees of the NSOC in the years 2022 and 2024. Average ratings were as follows: conference content - 62% excellent 39% good, general academics of speakers - 73% excellent 28% good, poster presentations - 38% excellent 44% good 18% neutral, friendliness of organisers - 63% excellent, 38% good.

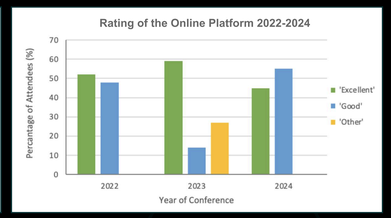


Figure 2: Feedback responses from attendees of the NSOC in the years 2022, 2023 and 2024 asked "how would you rate the online platform for this conference?". Average ratings were 52% excellent, 39% good and 9% other.

DISCUSSION

The NSOC has demonstrated the potential of virtual conferences in delivering accessible, engaging, and high-quality ophthalmology education. It has attracted a growing international audience whilst maintaining high satisfaction ratings and increasing interest in ophthalmology, underscoring the conference's role in inspiring future professionals.

Attendees praised the educational value, speaker quality and opportunity for skill development, particularly through presentations. The findings emphasise the success of virtual platforms, highlighting the importance of diverse and relevant talk topics.

However, limitations such as questionnaire biases and inconsistent formatting of feedback forms preclude further analysis.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study evidences the NSOC in effectively engaging a global audience to deliver high-quality teaching, mentorship and skill development, enhancing interests in ophthalmology. Such events can be replicated across specialities, serving as vital tools in medical education at various career levels. Furthermore, this study serves as a benchmark for future events, providing valuable feedback for future organisers.