

The Society of Authors

Authors' Appearances survey 2010

Thank you to all who responded to the Author Appearances questionnaire. We have learned a considerable amount. Forms of appearance vary widely, indeed so do individual festivals from one year to the next, and authors have differing priorities and personal experiences; so of necessity this report is selective and somewhat subjective. The intention has been to identify issues of general concern or uncertainty and attempt to address them.

Kate Pool

Contents

General

- Some of the challenges and opportunities*
- Authors' motivation*
- Sources of dissatisfaction*
- Some of the basics*

Literary festivals

- Fees*
- Reasons to be properly paid*
- Recording your event*
- When authors may accept a low fee*
- Expenses*
- Large and small festivals*
- Some of the main festivals*
- Non-literary and foreign festivals*

Publishers and literary agents

Bookshops

Libraries

Other small venues

Radio

Schools

Universities

Conferences and business venues

Foreign literary festivals and author tours

EFL tours

Payment problems

Checklist for your invoice

Checklist for appearances

Further information

General

Featuring highest in a word-search on the responses are the words 'fun', 'exhausting' and 'waste of time'. They are perhaps more accurate measures of authors' main criteria when choosing to make public appearances than whether the experience is likely to prove demonstrably profitable in real terms, or even in terms of books sold. What is also apparent is

that many of the complaints could be easily remedied simply by a bit more focus, care and effort on the part of the host organisation – and if authors felt their payment was, in the context of that particular event, fair.

Some of the challenges

There seem to be innumerable smaller festivals. Are there now too many?

Is the 'literary' side of the big festivals sinking under the demand (or perceived demand) for celebrities?

The austerity measures are, alas, bound to have an impact on the economics of library and school visits.

Some of the opportunities

Online networking and internet-based research leave people ever more physically isolated, while ensuring that the number of newly published works rises overwhelmingly each year. Musicians have learnt that the way to stand out from the crowd is to do gigs, inject the personal touch, meet fans face to face. The same perhaps goes for authors.

The downturn and austerity drive: when people are cost-cutting, cheap and relatively local events – such as festivals – become increasingly attractive.

The big festivals and overseas tours are best for 'big name' novelists, general non-fiction writers and poets; local events can be good – within their limitations – for midlist authors; children's writers tend to find other appearances pay less, and are less likely to attract the right age-group audience, than school visits; non-fiction writers might want to consider national radio, specialist festivals and conferences, and corporate speaking.

Authors' motivation

Money (often meaning fair payment, rather than a realistic attempt to make the time involved clearly profitable), publicity, pleasure...

For authors of fiction and general non-fiction, there is the contradiction at the heart of all arts – the public's choice of books and authors is highly subjective. Festivals offer people the chance to meet and hear from sought-after authors. It is flattering to be included in such invitations. And most authors enjoy the chance to rub shoulders with a keen audience – as well

as to fraternise with fellow writers (not to mention the odd publisher and publicist in attendance).

Lesser events (local bookshops and libraries, for instance, and the smaller festivals) may be good for midlist and genre writers. But frequently an element of loyalty – a desire to support that of which you approve – is also a deciding factor.

Sources of dissatisfaction

Discovering (often only when talking to them) that fellow-authors are being treated better, or paid more, than you are.

Poor use of your time – e.g. no publicity, inaccurate publicity, being on a large panel so actually speaking for less than 15 minutes.

Poor organisation.

Lack of manners: not troubling to check your bibliography, no welcome, no thank you letter.

Poor hospitality: sometimes, with small events, even forgetting that authors need food and drink.

Some of the basics

In roughly equal measure, appearance bookings are originated by the host organisations, publishers, and authors themselves. When it comes to doing the administration, that is down to authors or their publishers. If you leave this to your publisher, there may be drawbacks, see *Publishers*. There are of course exceptions, but authors reported that host organisations of all sorts are mainly OK about allowing books to be sold, and helping to sell them. Speed of payment is generally only a major problem where the host (usually a local authority) chooses to pay freelancers via the pay roll. Cancellation is rare (indeed those who face an audience of three might wish it happened more often). When events are cancelled, the speaker is seldom paid a fee, but as long as they did not turn other work away and are not out of pocket, that is probably unsurprising.

Literary festivals

Although many members have had the odd unfortunate experience, there was little to suggest that – in general – aspects like checking out the venue, IT support, special requirements, unsatisfactory accommodation etc are a significant or persistent problem. Indeed festival organisers seem generally to be doing a good job, and I suspect that where there are problems, the root cause may often be too small a budget/too few staff to cope.

When accepting an invitation, you might find it handy to refer to the checklist given at the end of this report.

Fees for festival appearances

‘Too many hosts hope you will not ask for a fee at all, or utter the dreaded words: what do you drink?’

The rates recommended by the Society are £350 and £250 respectively for full and half-day engagements, plus expenses. A fair number of the bigger-name authors felt that fees generally paid – especially by the big festivals – are too low, but most

respondents felt that the Society’s recommended rates are on target.

In practice, fees range from zero to £400+ for some big authors; many festivals pay in the region of £100–£250 (plus expenses). £150+ was, on balance, broadly acceptable to most respondents, even though ‘often this fee is too low for me to accept without other factors playing a strong part to mitigate that’. (In Scotland for events part-subsidised by Scottish Book Trust, the fee is set at £150 per session.)

‘I suspect that only the really well established authors will quibble about fee size. The rest of us would be delighted to have the opportunity to talk to a large audience.’ The few who haggle say it rarely results in a higher fee. However, do ensure that you do not undersell yourself. In certain instances, many respondents would be willing to accept no fee; the vast majority stressed that they would not countenance being paid less than fellow-authors. It is entirely reasonable to ask for confirmation that you are being paid as much as everyone else, when accepting an invitation. Adding insult to injury, many only find out that someone else is getting more than them during chit-chat at the event. (It may be wrong, in such cases, to assume that the fault invariably lies with the festival. See *Publishers*.) Many concede that high-profile celebrities will be treated differently; though, given that these are literary festivals, there is some unease about paying high fees to attract star speakers.

Reasons to be properly paid

A talk involves preparation and travelling time (so all told, an event will rarely take up less than a full day in practice).

Some who gave talks for no fee said they later regretted it (‘left a bad taste’, ‘I felt conned’).

A fair return: ‘I feel it is a little bizarre that a local low-profile festival can afford to pay me £300–£350 a day, plus expenses, whereas high profile festivals tend to pay less and require publishers to pay all expenses. I think the rates for the higher profile festivals should be better, especially as author events are generally sponsored.’ ‘I do get cross when you take in, say, 500 people paying £8 each, and are paid not a penny out of the £3,500+ (including comps, concession etc). No rock group or comedian would dream of accepting such a deal.’ ‘Edinburgh, Cheltenham and Hay pay least. Go figure.’ ‘£150 for an appearance at Appledore, plus expenses, is generous compared to £150 for the same talk at [Cheltenham or Edinburgh] when the latter have 4x as many in the audience.’ ‘Bearing in mind that some festivals are now big business, they should pay speakers commensurate fees. £250-500 should be the norm.’

The sponsors of big festivals are wealthy, and they are demanding ever more from their speakers – authors should not feel that they are somehow being disloyal or unsupportive of the festival staff if they ask for a reasonable fee.

Recording your event

There is a growing tendency for newspaper sponsors to demand the right to record the event and take all rights in the recording. Most respondents suggested that they would not have a problem

with their talk being recorded. But when pressed (subsequent to this survey), most members agree that 'extra publicity' is by no means the only consideration. You may feel restricted in how you talk (the unguarded comment, an off-the-cuff retort to a trying member of the audience, a facetious aside which does not come across well). You may find your clever joke, or core content, appearing all over YouTube which undermines its value for future talks. The festival's newspaper sponsor could make wide use of your talk, possibly edited, potentially uncredited – including commercial use (e.g. in a paid-for part of the paper's online content). If you consider your talk as being the direct equivalent of publishing an article, you may be more wary about granting wide re-use rights, at least without some guarantee of editorial control and payment of a commensurately higher fee.

You may be willing to accept a low fee if...

It is somewhere you would like to visit;

It is local so you do not need to spend much time, trouble or money travelling;

You are confident that you will be well treated by the hosts and will meet nice people – that you will have fun;

You are confident that the organisation is efficient, and that the publicity is top quality;

It is good for your CV (applies particularly to Hay, Edinburgh and Cheltenham) or gives you a chance to network with other authors, publishers and agents in your genre;

The festival is under-funded, or for a charity or cause which you support;

You are a relatively unknown author, or write in an overlooked genre, so it affords a great opportunity to raise your profile.

Expenses

Expenses should be – and it seems almost invariably are – paid for festival appearances. The important thing is to clarify from the outset whether it is the festival or your publisher who will be picking up the tab.

Large v small festivals

For the big festivals, it is probably fair to say that you need to be robust, and in demand.

There are of course complaints but the big three (Hay, Cheltenham and Edinburgh) are generally much praised. Most authors accept that they are flattered to be invited and that the plus points (high levels of fun, professionalism and publicity, large audiences) are why they go. Edinburgh and Cheltenham pay fees – though less than those paid by some of the smaller festivals. Hay of course does not pay a fee.

Given that they are big businesses, sponsored, and they charge audiences to attend, all three are paying well below what they should. Hard-pressed schools pay authors properly, and local hosts like libraries and clubs do their best to offer modest fees. It strikes me as shameful that events at the higher end of the scale cannot do better.

Particularly when it comes to Hay, you need to be able to afford to do it and, if you are in that position, you will probably enjoy it. However, some respondents said they find the big festivals somewhat impersonal. 'They look after their writers very nicely, are very smoothly organised, and provide great publicity simply through their brochures; but the audiences – and book-sales – can be spread very thinly. Smaller festivals can actually provide better audiences – and book sales, but you have to be very astute about how well they might be organised.' 'The most enjoyable ones are the smaller, quirkier ones where you feel that the organisers are genuinely glad to have you there, and make an effort to give you a good welcome. However, these smaller festivals can also sometimes feel a bit shambolic.' 'Nailsworth and Tetbury's the Yellow-Lighted Bookshop organised a tiny festival recently and it was lovely. It had people who are actually writers! Small, intimate and unflashy.' And the opposing view: 'Many others far too small to be worth going to. Too many minute micro-festivals.'

Where festivals include strands for children, beware of lower fees (it does not often happen, but is a risk if audiences for children's events are charged less). A number of children's writers observed that with school visits, the fees are better and of course sessions are better targeted at the correct age-group; but festivals offer the opportunity to talk to a wider audience and are good 'for the experience and the atmosphere and the fact that you're very well looked after, generally.'

Hay (sponsored by the Guardian)

'Fun' crops up frequently. Many respondents have spoken at Hay and most clearly had a great time. In 2010 ticket sales were up 13%. There was praise for impeccable organisation, lovely surroundings and excellent catering. But also 'snooty, impersonal, industrial, you feel like a cog in a machine.' 'Hay is a rip-off, expecting most writers to appear for free or peanuts to subsidise high fees for big names.' 'The day I was there you really had to search to find a writer – a point that was confirmed to me by various members of the visiting public.'

Those involved in some of the peripheral strands – children's and Culture Cymru for instance – still feel a bit marginalised but there is a sense that those areas are improving. And on a technical point: 'the booking system leads to false sell-outs.'

As for the six bottles of Cava? 'I was on the train', 'I am an enforced teetotaler', 'I live abroad', 'miles from my car on a muddy day', 'OK for a bestseller but I can't afford to do this regularly', 'if you are very poor being paid in champagne has its ironies'. The lack of fee 'effectively de-professionalises the people on whom they rely.' In a nutshell: 'At Hay last year I spoke to 1,050 people, each paying between £8 and £10; the reward was half a case of fizzy wine.'

I hope that Hay's new sponsors, the *Telegraph*, will rise to paying proper fees to all speakers.

Cheltenham (The Times)

Many have spoken at Cheltenham, and again, many had a great time. 'Well run, masses of assistants and technicians.' 'On the

ball, friendly, generous (e.g. with passes into other events and refreshments in authors' room) and welcoming.' 'Lovely staff but [as with Hay, for children's events] tickets had been sold to children not of the age group advertised.' Cheltenham does pay a modest fee – currently £150. (A couple reported no fee. I wonder whether this may be related to bookings made by publishers? See Publishers). It seems it is worthwhile speaking up – well in advance – if you feel you have, for instance, been put on an inappropriate panel or teamed with the wrong chair. 'Sometimes slack on the details and seem to rely on authors' interests (wording on programme etc) to be in the hands of the authors' publicists.'

Our survey went out before this year's festival, for which authors have since reported being sent draconian forms granting the festival (and its sponsor) all rights in recordings of their talks. On this, see *Recording your Event* (p.2).

Edinburgh

Again, many respondents have appeared at Edinburgh, which was much loved when run by Catherine Lockerbie (the survey went out before this year's festival). Like Cheltenham, Edinburgh currently pays £150. Members also appreciate that the fee is the same across the board. Highly praised as hospitable, well organised, with good promotional materials; many say they are flattered to be asked to be involved. For children's writers Edinburgh 'sometimes throws in school visits which is appreciated'. There was, however, a feeling that where someone is a principal speaker on a panel, and for chairing, the fees are too low. There was also surprisingly strong distaste at the suggestion which accompanies their invitation that authors might care to waive their fee.

The hope of course is that Catherine Lockerbie's successor can maintain the festival's high reputation.

Other literary festivals regularly mentioned

Oxford (*the Sunday Times*): this is the only widely commented on festival about which, alas, complaints outweighed praise. For example 'too grand for its boots', 'too small a budget, so there is insufficient admin, and muddle is not just common but perpetual', 'it felt dominated by the *Sunday Times* sponsorship which cared only about its press rather than the events themselves'. The lack of fee was deplored and seen as unjustified – per se and given what Oxford asks in return. It 'pays nothing but expects you to do filming as well as your event.' At least one year it required speakers 'to sign an exclusivity clause not to speak elsewhere within a radius of 50 miles of Oxford for the two weeks before and after the event.'

I am sure the organisers do their best, the festival is young and growing, and certainly some respondents enjoyed their appearances. But the event and its sponsor need to do better.

Ways with Words at Dartington, Southwold and Keswick: generally thumbs up, and to Kay Dunbar (at Dartington). Members could not see any justification in no fee, especially at Dartington (sponsored by the *Telegraph*) where the catering was also criticised. But most were impressed, particularly at Keswick, by

'impeccable organisation, surroundings, big audiences, well-organised sales.' 'Hugely pleasurable.'

Charleston: repeatedly praised for atmosphere and authors being well treated and having a good time.

Bath: a mixed response (some suggest that perhaps it invites more speakers than it can properly cope with) but on the up. The children's strand: 'good at including links with local schools so authors keep in touch with those schools' outreach activities.'

Wellington (in Shropshire): 'generous fees (and prompt in paying) and treats authors well, despite being small.' 'It offers free entry into every event. It is run by the Town Council as a non-profit festival and all the money is raised to pay for the event. It is part of the philosophy that it should be accessible for all. I think this is a good thing.'

In Scotland, praise especially for *Borders*. Also *Aye Write in Glasgow, StAnza, and Wigtown* (though *Wigtown* is perhaps not so popular with children's writers).

A number of other festivals were mentioned, generally to acclaim. It is impressive how generous many of them are, and how many of them have involved SoA members.

Not literary festivals

Members may want to consider festivals other than the purely literary. A handful of those mentioned:

Starlit: 'really good as unreached audience of inner city kids and sponsorship from city (London, Shoreditch)'

Newwriters UK (Nottingham): 'for new and novice writers'

How the Light Gets In: festival of music and philosophy in Hay
Eastercon, 'a yearly science-fiction convention with a strong literary angle'

LGBT festivals such as *Pride events, Homotopia, Queer Up North, and the York Lesbian Arts Festival*.

Some foreign literary festivals commended by members:

Oslo, Toronto, Ottawa, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane, Auckland, Dubai, The Shakespeare & Company Festival in Paris. In addition, 'all the festivals I have been to in Europe take great care with every single detail of my work from the space to the lighting, to the accommodation, the travel and the payment. I find with every UK festival that I am really just not famous enough to deserve any of the above.'

Publishers and agents

Respondents are appreciative and supportive of any efforts a publisher makes to promote their book, and entirely understand that in the vast majority of cases, given the number of books being published every year and how busy PR departments are, all an author can expect is a couple of weeks of effort around first publication. Many troubled to praise individuals (though wearily often added 'but so-and-so has now moved on...'). But alas the

overall impression given is that when it comes to constructive help over author appearances, the most common word to describe publishers is 'useless'.

Books

Considerable frustration that the only way to be sure books will be there is to bring them yourself. Repeated complaints of publishers forgetting to supply books even when they have promised to do so. Then again, as one member pointed out, 'if they bring copies of my books to sell, all I get is a tiny royalty. But if I buy them off Amazon I can do quite well.'

Geography

'Clueless'. 'London publishers' PR departments seem to have appallingly little knowledge of the geography of the rest of the country.' If your publishers are booking you for a series of events, try to ensure you have some say over the itinerary. And if they book transport, again check: authors have found themselves stranded, with a ticket bought by the publisher but no trains running in the right direction at that time of day.

Priorities

There is some suspicion that publishers do not always put forward lesser authors for festivals because they prefer to see the bigger names on their list given priority. They tend to care only about the latest title, forgetting your backlist (which can affect what you are asked to talk about, and which of your books are on sale). Some bigger authors felt their publishers prioritise the bigger festivals even when that is not what the author prefers; and that some publishers are not entirely reliable at passing on to the author requests from festivals which the publisher is not itself inclined to follow up.

Payment

Consistently authors reported that if they fixed up an appearance themselves, they could secure a fee; if the arrangements were made by the publisher: no fee. 'Publishers are naturally interested in getting writers to sell books, which can mean that they sign writers up for appearances that might otherwise be paid.' Or as another said, 'they seem very willing to give away my time for nothing'. Publishers very rarely seem to raise with hosts the question of a fee.

Generally, for pretty much any appearance where the host does not pay travel, it seems that publishers will pay an author's reasonable travel expenses – but you want to ensure that who is paying what is clearly agreed at the outset.

Take control

For the round of publicity at the time of publication, publishers can be excellent at securing appearances in bookshops; expenses-only for such events is largely standard. However, you may want to clarify that publisher-organised, expenses-only appearances, other than with your prior agreement, are for only a finite period around first publication, and limited to small

venues. It is advisable to insist you have some say over any proposed itinerary.

For appearances in bookshops other than at publication, and for appearances at festivals and schools, publishers should be applauded for any engagements they can set up, and urged to forward all requests to you, but you may want to insist that they then leave you to liaise direct with the host on all details. One of many such comments: 'I used to let my publishers' publicity people do the organising. After a series of cockups I find it easier to make the arrangements myself.'

Literary agents

Helpful about author appearances? 'Too time-consuming for too small a return,' 'utterly useless,' 'never involved unless I specifically ask her a question. She takes a minimalist approach to everything except her fee.'

Bookshops

Are bookshop appearances worth it? 'Who knows?' 'Probably worth it... sometimes.' Then again, 'It's only my experience of talking at lowly bookshops and libraries with tiny audiences that has enabled me to become a Nadfas lecturer – which in turn has led to other engagements in the UK and the USA.'

Bookshop appearances are traditionally the staple of publishers' publicity on publication. Daunt's Bookshop round the corner from the SoA hosts regular, popular events which include a reading, Q&A and a glass of wine, but a number of respondents said they are asked to do noticeably fewer such events these days. Could it be because publishers are less convinced there's much point; or that audiences now prefer festivals? Or is it simply that there are fewer bookshops?

Payment

Fees are generally not paid. Expenses should be paid by the publisher (though if travelling any distance, check in advance).

Positives

Many authors rightly feel a sense of loyalty to bookshops and want to do their bit to support them. Giving readers the chance to meet the real, live author of the books they love is something online retailers cannot offer.

Audiences may be small but are almost always enthusiastic. Bookshops are more intimate than festivals and offer a better chance to talk to readers.

Specialist non-fiction authors report sometimes selling quantities of books (the audience may well have been attracted by the subject-matter rather than because they have already bought the author's works).

In contrast, a fiction writer said 'I like these events very much and have done a great many of them. The people who come have usually read my books already, so it's not about making sales. I like meeting my readers because they tend to be a likeable bunch. I try to get a good Q&A going and I try to create an upbeat and good-humoured atmosphere, so that people go away

with the feeling that they've had a good evening. Maybe that makes them inclined to buy my next book or recommend my stuff to their friends.'

'The issue is connecting with readers, many of whom do not feel confident enough – or don't have financial or time resources – to attend literary festivals. Selling books is not the point, more the sharing of ideas and making sure that all kinds of readers have the same opportunities to listen to the authors they enjoy reading.'

'I've come across authors who sulked if the audience wasn't gratifyingly large. All this does is ensure that, after the author has gone, the bookseller will make no particular attempts to hand-sell or recommend their work.'

Negatives

Most feel obliged to do a tour of bookshops on publication (and live in hope that they are worth it) but most reckon that they end up out of pocket, if only in terms of time away from writing, and doubt that (other than for big names) such tours have much impact on book sales.

'Hell on wheels.' 'Exhaustion, frustration and embarrassment for a midlist author.' 'Too soon, before the major reviews (hah!), and audiences can be small.' 'The audience is limited by the size of the shop and fees are never paid, so only worth it if it is local.' 'Will shift books if likely to get a decent audience – but how to tell?'

Some tips

Check the flier, do your preparation, 'do not rely on others to make the thing work.'

For children's writers, schools and libraries may often be preferable venues.

A group of authors may work better than just one (and saves the embarrassment of someone sitting in isolation behind a tower of unsold books).

'Signings can be agony.' Some respondents suggest that privately signing books and helping publishers sticker them may be a better use of everyone's time.

'Two bookshops or library talks in one day are enough, in my opinion.'

'Reward bookshops who've done a good event for you in the past by returning again, rather than always seeking to go to new places.'

Think local: it avoids the time and expense of travel; exploit any local links you or your book may have.

Libraries

Payment

It is laudable (and puts the big festivals to shame) that libraries generally pay at least modest fees (sometimes it is the publisher who pays travel expenses). 'I sometimes ask the library if it has any money and if it says yes, we negotiate a fee.' Alas, members may increasingly wonder whether expecting fees from libraries is always appropriate, if indeed they continue to be offered.

Positives

Many authors feel strongly that libraries need all the support they can get.

Public and school librarians are 'friendly, cheerful and generous with their time.' They will probably have read your latest book, and are much more likely to stock your backlist than most other venue hosts.

They will make efforts, albeit not always successfully, to drum up an audience. They are generally good on organising; some will also permit selling books – though you will probably need to bring the stock yourself, and will want to keep an eye on the till being manned.

Library events are often coordinated with school visits (in which case standard school fees generally apply) and are anyway generally popular with children.

Libraries are good venues for midlist crime and romance writers – though some said that 'authors higher up the food-chain' are now doing libraries.

Library appearances 'can be good for establishing dialogue which can inform the author's later writing.'

A romance writer said 'after a library Girls' Night In, planned by my local writers' group with help from the library service, my (US-published, generally difficult to find) book appeared in my local Waterstone's. I can only think they saw publicity which mentioned me and followed up on it. A nice surprise.'

Negatives

Few think that, other than in rare instances, library appearances have any great impact on sales. They generally cannot be said to be worth the time and expense other than where they are local.

Miranda McKearny, director of the Reading Agency (which administers projects like Reading Partners setting up events linking publishers, authors and libraries), recently observed that cutbacks mean 'there is a very real danger of libraries retrenching to a position where the reading service is basically just books on shelves. That would be a disaster.'

Other small venues and bright ideas

'There's a brilliant scheme called Young Cultural Creators which teams up a museum or art gallery, a local library and a school. The author chooses an object in the gallery to relate to a book, the children visit the gallery and listen to a talk, they return to school and do some work based on the book and the gallery visit, then go to the local library where the author goes to see what they've done. I've done this in Tate Britain, the National Portrait Gallery and the Wellcome Foundation Museum. It's always been great.'

Another respondent talks about Portsmouth's Crime & the City Event. There are no doubt many other such ventures.

The list of potential small venues is great: charity events; 'I am a regular speaker at clubs etc, paid modestly, aged 77. Incidentally I don't look my age, have a good speaking voice, and always dress well for the occasion; talks for small groups of elderly folk, local history societies, allotment societies, literary lunch

clubs, literary and philosophical societies, Townswomen's Guild, WI, Nadfas, U3A, Rotary and Inner Wheel events.

Almost all report that for such engagements, their expenses are paid and/or a modest fee – often in the region of £50. Most are flexible about the fee depending on the wealth of the event (and whether the event will be making a profit). Our guidelines would be £50 plus expenses for clearly very modest venues; anywhere from £75 to the Society's full recommended rates for well-funded, sponsored or profit-making ticket-selling events. Again, you may want to charge more if distance affects the time and cost involved. For full-blown literary lunches and similar, some members report fees of £300 plus travel.

Such events seem particularly good for history (notably local history) and biography, the arts generally, and travel. Consider targeting and approach potential venues yourself; bring books to sell if you can. The feedback is that speakers are usually treated well and have an enjoyable time.

One respondent suspects there is a public appetite for more reading/story-telling events – certainly poets find this to be true. If it appeals to you but seems daunting, the Society hosts *Giving a Reading* workshops in London (if there is sufficient demand we may be able to do so elsewhere as well) – see the winter issue of *The Author*.

Radio

Respondents divide into those who rather enjoy radio interviews, and those who cannot tolerate them. It probably depends in part on how much control you take over the interview; and whether you are likely to be reaching the right audience.

Local radio does not pay fees. It is unrealistic to expect local radio presenters to have read your book. It is up to you to feed them something to talk about. Know what you want to say before you get there. Where possible, go for the local angle. Only say yes if you believe there is a fair chance that your potential readership may be listening.

For non-fiction especially, the feedback is that national radio, particularly slots like *Start the Week*, also the World Service and World TV, can have a noticeable impact on sales (and raise your profile/boost traffic to your website). Local radio generally less so, other than e.g. for local history, where respondents often report that a radio interview can affect sales more than a bookshop event.

Quite a few members found going to a studio less satisfactory than conducting a radio interview from home on the phone. If you do have to go to a studio, ask for free parking or for the station to supply a car. Even then, there is the time taken travelling, the interviewer may be speaking to you from a different station, it may be late at night or very early in the morning.

When being booked, clarify what you are being asked to do (interview, group chat, audience phone-in). If you are engaged as a specialist on a topic, rather than plugging a new book, for national radio you should be able to extract a (small) fee. For

more on interviews, see Julia Cresswell's article in the winter *Author*. When it comes to having your brains picked by TV and radio producers, see *Supplying Material for Documentaries* by Mike Sharland (in the members' section of our website). We are aware that members would appreciate further guidance on fees in this area; it is a very inexact science but we will do our best.

Schools

Of course there are exceptions but on balance the points queried in the survey (e.g. willingness to sell books, being helpful about technical equipment, special needs etc) seem to be satisfactory. Further information is given in our *Guide for Schools* inviting *Authors*. See also Ted Dewan's article in the winter *Author*.

One database was repeatedly mentioned as a good source of engagements in schools: Contact an Author (www.contactanauthor.co.uk).

Payment

In Scotland, for visits part-subsidised by Scottish Book Trust the fee is £150 per session. Last year, Scottish Book Trust sponsored 12,000 author appearances. In the rest of the UK, respondents divided between those who strongly felt it inappropriate to expect hard-pressed schools to pay at all, and those who believe equally strongly in all that is good about schools and what teachers are trying to do, but point out that schools and local authorities are, as one would hope and expect, accustomed to paying experts for their time and skills. A visiting author, in terms of both input and value (to the school and the pupils), is often doing more than a supply teacher.

The rates recommended by the Society are £350 and £250 respectively for full and half-day engagements (to cover a maximum of three sessions in a day), plus expenses. We suggest a fee of £150 for a single session not exceeding one hour (plus expenses) when the author is visiting a local venue or carrying out a number of separate visits e.g. to schools in a single area.

There was general agreement that the SoA recommended rates are about right. Some choose to quote the rates and then offer themselves cheaper. A few think they are too low but, in the current climate, now would not seem the right time to increase them. Many schools pay the SoA rate or thereabouts, though one respondent said there was a disparity between the resources of schools in the north and south of England. Overseas schools, and international schools in the UK, seem to pay noticeably better. Beware: if a school appearance is organised by your publisher, the question of a fee may not be raised.

If you are paid by a local authority, you may have problems with tax being deducted and (if you are VAT registered) VAT not being added. For more, see *Payment Problems*.

When deciding whether an appearance is worth the fee, the distance travelled needs to be taken into account as even short engagements can actually eat up a whole day. If an overnight stay is involved you can probably make that two days – which can make the agreed fee seem rather less attractive. But if you can fit in a number of schools in the area over that couple of days...

Legal requirements (or not)

Schools occasionally ask for CRB clearance, frequently when such clearance is not required because the author already has public liability insurance (which insists that the author not be left alone with children at any time). Some schools, even within a single local authority, request a fresh CRB check per engagement; there are reports of members being required to produce photo ID; one was asked for (quite intrusive) personal data for a 'risk assessment'; others are checked for List 99. It is not only the expense and bureaucracy of securing such items and the implicit accusatory invasion of privacy that are bothering. The main trouble with all this is that schools and local authorities, not surprisingly, tend to be unclear (and therefore often over-zealous) and inconsistent in their requirements. And sometimes those requirements, e.g. what is deemed appropriate ID, only become apparent when the author is on the doorstep.

There is a sense that school bookings are going down – a trend which seems likely to continue with the spending cuts and continued uncertainties about security clearances. Children's writers, in particular, do not need to be told what a pity this is: such appearances are clearly enormously enjoyed by them and the children – and are an important addition to the otherwise heavily exam-led curriculum. We continue to lobby about CRB checks and ISA proposals; as well as about the reductive nature of the current curriculum (for more see *Further information* at the end of this report).

Universities

Generally the points listed in the survey (e.g. helpful about technical equipment, special needs etc) do not seem to be a major problem – though universities can be a bit remiss about remembering that authors need sustenance. However, the way you are treated does not seem to be the main point: the consistent response was that talking in universities is just too much of a pain because of problems over tax deductions and failure to include VAT. For more, see *Payment problems*.

If you are considered to be filling an 'in-house' slot, you will probably not be paid. If your appearance is equated to a sessional lecture you should be able to negotiate a fee – I understand that would usually in the region of £100 per session. If you have been invited for your name/expertise/celebrity status, make that clear and request a much higher fee accordingly. But do not be surprised if the considerable financial pressure on universities affects what you can expect.

If you suspect your talk may be recorded, check the situation in advance (it can be almost impossible to get plans changed at the time, especially for panel discussions and debates). See also *Recording your Event* (p.2).

Conferences and business venues

The survey did not ask directly about conferences – something which covers an enormous range of appearances, and massive discrepancy on the possible size of the fee. That did not deter members from commenting (thank you). For most UK

conferences, non-fiction writers report that fees are not paid, though expenses are usually met. But conferences tend to be good places to sell books and to promote yourself, your expertise and your website; good also for networking with other contacts in your subject area. With academic conferences, unless you are a plenary speaker you will not be paid and will be lucky even to have your expenses met. It might, however, be worth trying for free entry to the conference or to events within the conference.

Where speaking at commercial venues, or non-literary festivals (e.g. Mind Body Spirit) for which attenders pay, you should be paid. Take care not to underprice yourself. Members (not only big names, also experts in their field) cited fees in the region of £500–£1,000 (especially for an event which may, including travel, take a few days); and some professional public speakers (again specialists, not just celebrities) may on occasion be able to treble that when presenting to businesses and similar. Take a look at the website of the Professional Speaking Association, www.professionalspeakersassociation.co.uk.

Members warn that you should check what the organisers have in mind. There are reports of authors finding themselves caught up in inappropriately sensationalist or biased panel discussions, for instance.

Foreign festivals and tours

Publisher-organised foreign tours

The ubiquitous comment: 'exhausting'. Some respondents enjoy them nevertheless, while others consider them 'incredibly tiring and time-wasting, and not rewarding in terms of book sales.' When it comes to the USA, 'tours are strange and frustrating animals. A 5+ city tour costs the publisher a fortune and yet it is very hard to see the effort as worthwhile... there is so little interest in serious books in the States that the media coverage is often minimal, unless you are an Oprah candidate.' The conclusion would seem to be: worth it if you enjoy that sort of thing; and if you are a big enough name that your publisher treats you well ('top authors are sent out business class and with a dedicated publicist, which can get the backs up of authors who are sent economy with several writers sharing one publicist'). It helps if the tour is to a country which appeals to you.

Always check the logic and timing of the proposed itinerary – to avoid punishing schedules (no time to eat, or rest); schedules which are too gappy (marooned between events on your own in a hotel where you cannot even open the window), and routes which needlessly double back on themselves. If your publisher obtains your tickets, remind them to ensure the name on the ticket exactly matches that on your passport.

Fees are not paid for tours. Where you are entitled to a modest fee, e.g. for a one-off appearance at a foreign university, to avoid tax hassles one member suggests that you ask for good quality meals, local transportation and accommodation in lieu.

Author-organised foreign visits

I was surprised at how many authors fix such things up for themselves, often via their publishers in the country in question. You control the itinerary (though may end up paying a larger share, if not all, of the expenses). The impression is that foreign

publishers are likely to be welcoming and go to considerable trouble, while foreign festivals pay well. ‘There is no interest in “celebrity” and a much higher level of intelligent interest in the subject.’ ‘Germany is best. They always pay you, usually in cash.’ ‘German bookshops pay for appearances and signings but expect a good 30–40 minutes’ reading/talk in return.’ ‘My publishers in Spain and Italy treat me as a serious VIP, and organise meals on a wonderful scale.’ ‘My Spanish publisher (a small but enthusiastic house) was most kind, considerate and generous.’ ‘As a midlist author, touring is apparently too expensive for my publisher. However when travelling I contacted my overseas publishers who were brilliant, especially the USA, Australia and New Zealand where I was treated like a king.’

Tax, visas and other problem areas

We publish some guidance on double-tax formalities and in particular how to obtain the required ITIN and other forms for the US (see *Further information* at the end of this report), and will seek to expand the guidance on European tax formalities.

There were many requests for firm guidance on visas (in particular, when a visitor’s visa will be sufficient and, where not, what would be appropriate) and public liability requirements. We cannot promise but will do what we can. In the meantime, some comments:

The USA: ‘If you have a journalist’s visa, US entry is even more grim than it usually is.’ ‘If you take a one-off fee directly from an event organiser in the US, you will be deemed to need a work permit (even if you really don’t) by the Immigration officials and by the organiser’s finance office.’ ‘If you are in the USA on a J1 visa (visiting lecturer/scholar and similar) you will not be able to earn any money above that offered by the host institution unless that institution grants permission. Even then the paperwork will be horrendous.’ A 1977 driving conviction meant one author was no longer eligible for a US visa waiver.

Other countries: ‘Canada will characterise almost everything as “employment”, even an honourarium for delivering a speech. I had to purchase a temporary work visa at the airport on one occasion (my clients were very embarrassed and kindly refunded the cost).’ ‘Some countries e.g. Turkey require an entry tax on arrival.’ ‘Don’t write “author” on a Chinese visa application. It won’t be granted.’ ‘Visas for India are expensive and a hassle – I use a service, CIBT, which costs a lot but handles it for me; however it is possible to get a multiple-entry business visa so if you go there frequently you can use just the one visa.’ ‘At one Australian festival a woman walked around handing authors bundles of cash, because with the entertainer visiting visas technically required, I’d have needed to register for Australian tax etc just for a nominal fee.’

EFL

EFL writers are frequently asked – indeed expected – to give overseas presentations and promotional talks, particularly at conferences. Such events can crop up at any time, and ‘saying you are too busy does not go down well’. Generally publishers are helpful and attentive to their touring authors. All your expenses should (and usually are) met, but you are advised to

check that the host bodies and the publishers know which of them is paying for e.g. travel, accommodation, food, conference registration fees.

EFL authors are very rarely paid fees for these engagements. But digitisation and the internet, as well as the rise in target countries themselves producing such materials rather than sourcing them from the UK, mean that the landscape of EFL publishing is changing. Increasingly an individual author is only one of many contributors to a course, and increasingly their royalty-bearing materials (or the anticipated royalties on those materials) are being whittled away. EFL authors need to consider whether devoting often quite substantial amounts of time to promoting the publisher’s products is reasonable, unless it is properly paid for. ‘Stipulate that you will only do talks in markets where your books sell.’ ‘Commit to, say, two weeks of promotional work after which you reserve the right to charge £500 per day.’

Things which can make the tour more pleasant: booking the travel yourself (one author adds: ‘bearing the publisher’s economy drive in mind, I sometimes book business class but then claim economy’), or at least having a say over the itinerary. ‘Tours are often organised by people who don’t plan the travel logistics – you can be in the north of the country, then the south, then the north.’ Tours can be much more enjoyable if your partner can also come, but we are told that this may be frowned on by your publisher; and you may well have to foot the bill. ‘My publisher asked me to deduct the difference between a single and double room (£30) when claiming expenses.’ Always check technical equipment before a talk. And check who will be looking after you: ‘if you are not looked after by the local Rep, but maybe by a book distributor, they may be more or less helpful, ranging from indifferent (e.g. because your book is not a big seller for them) to ultra helpful because they understand that your good feeling will be reflected in a good show, which in turn reflects on them as a distributor.’

Common words: exhausting; punishing. But often also enjoyed, especially when the locations are exotic.

Payment problems

Most authors are self-employed (even where they invoice as a limited company) and a one-off engagement does not create a contract of employment. If you are self-employed, we strongly advise that you make clear to the organiser, from the outset, that neither tax nor NI should be deducted from your fee or expenses. Furthermore, if you are VAT-registered, remind them that you are legally obliged to charge VAT on top of both the fee and expenses. If you meet resistance, you may find it useful to quote the HMRC *Employment Status Manual* (section 4502) which says that ‘a visiting lecturer who gives a one-off talk or short series of talks on a subject about which he or she has specialist knowledge... is likely to be self-employed.’

Despite requests to the contrary, local authorities and it seems many universities have been known to insist on paying you via their pay roll, deducting tax and NI at source. If that happens,

you will need to add a PAYE section to your tax return, and are advised to check with your tax office that you do not unintentionally over-pay NI. Complications can also arise if your invoice distinguishes between fees and expenses; so it may be advisable to ask for a 'total package' price, not mentioning the word 'expenses'. If you are VAT registered, it is proving very hard to get unequivocal guidance but our understanding is that where you are paid via the pay roll, the transaction falls outside the scope of VAT (so VAT should not be added to either the fee or expenses on your invoice).

If you do a great deal of work for a single authority (as may happen with school visits, in particular), it may be possible to register as a supplier with that authority which we are told makes payment much easier.

The intransigency on the part of some payers on the question of paying freelancers via the pay roll has led to repeated reports, in the survey, of confusion, disputes, and the feeling that accepting further such engagements is simply too much hassle. The Society will continue to press for clear guidance and has recently written to the Tax Simplification Office about the problems.

Checklist for your invoice

Your name and address

The organisation's name and address

The date of the invoice

The date and title of the event

The department and reference number or other identifier of the event host

Your invoice number

Advisable particularly if you are VAT-registered. Pick a numbering which suits you, e.g. 111 meaning your first such engagement in 2011

The fee

Details of agreed expenses

You may also need to supply receipts

Your ten-digit UTR (Unique Taxpayer's Reference) number

Your National Insurance number

If you are VAT registered:

Your VAT number

If you will be paid by BACS:

Name of bank, branch address, sort code, name of account, account number

If appropriate add:

This service was provided by a self-employed tax payer. It is therefore a booking condition that payment [plus VAT if you are VAT-registered] be made in full, as per invoice, and that income tax etc. should not be deducted at source.

You may also want to add:

Payment is due within 30 days of invoice date. Statutory interest will be charged on overdue payments.

Events checklist

The purpose of the event, and the title of your session(s).

Date, time and precise location of the event (gam will not appeal to most audiences, in the slot after lunch the audience may be drowsy. A children's event on a Saturday will usually attract more than a mid-week or Sunday event.)

The profile of the audience (e.g. aspiring writers, experts in your field, the general public), and how many are expected. Is the event being held at the same time as others (which can affect who comes to yours)?

The nature of the venue (e.g. lecture theatre, informal grouping, around a table) and any relevant features (e.g. if the lighting is poor and you need the audience to read things).

The nature of the session (reading, talk, panel discussion). Will you be on your own, and/or chaired, and/or with fellow panelists? If so, who are they? Can/should you contact any of them in advance and, if so, how?

The number and length of your session(s), and how much of any session should be a presentation and how much left for questions and answers.

Is the event being sponsored and, if so, by whom?

The availability of technical equipment (projector, PowerPoint, sound system, internet connection). Do you need to hand in e.g. PowerPoint presentations in advance? Can you check the site before the talk? Will someone be on site in case it fails?

Is there any intention to record your event and, if so, is that acceptable to you?

For schools: are there clearances, ID or insurance requirements of which you need to be aware?

Name and contact details of the organiser.

Does the organiser have your name, contact details and website, and details of your latest/forthcoming books?

If relevant, does the organiser have the name and contact details for your publisher/publicist/agent?

Who is meeting you, when and where? Do you have each other's mobile phone numbers?

A map of how to reach the event, and details of suitable public transport.

Will you need accommodation?

Who is responsible for booking travel tickets and accommodation?

Will a parking space be reserved for you?

What is the position if you would like to bring/travel with a partner – or a dog?

Do you have any disabilities of which the organisers should be aware?

The arrangements for refreshments, and any special dietary requirements. Also, if relevant, are you obliged, or would you

like, to eat/stay for drinks with the audience. Might you have to mingle with them before your talk (which many speakers dislike)?

Are you expected to bring support materials e.g. a copy of your book, or handouts? May you do so if you wish? Can the venue photocopy materials for you if needed?

If the event can offer you the chance to sell your own books, who will sort out the arrangements for supplying books?

Who will be supplying the books: you? Your publisher (or might fliers be forwarded to the publisher be a safer bet)? A local bookseller (who may be able to offer a discount, or a modest commission to the event organiser on sales)? Will someone (not you) be on hand to sell the books?

What fee will you be paid?

Who will be paying your travel and subsistence expenses: the event host? Your publisher?

If in doubt, exactly what expenses may you charge for? Do you need to supply receipts?

With expenses like hotel bills, will the organisers pay them in advance? If not, what is the arrangement?

When will you be paid? (It should be within 30 days of the event.)

Do you need to supply an invoice? Assuming yes, do you need a reference number or other identifier? To whom, at what address, should you send the invoice?

If the event is cancelled, how much notice will you be given and what will you be paid? (As a minimum, any bona fide expenses incurred should be refunded.)

Further information

This report and the following items can be found on our website or from the SoA's offices on request:

- Checklist for Festival Organisers inviting Authors
- Guide for Schools inviting Authors
- Tax on foreign income, including American ITINs
- SoA concerns about reductive exam teaching
- SoA letter to the Tax Simplification Office.

Postscript

'There's always someone in the audience who knows more than you, even when you're talking about yourself.'