

“SFA’s extensive knowledge of the association conference market has generated a significant number of quality leads for Visit Belfast and helps to build our conference sales pipeline. They are methodical, reliable, great to work with and a valuable extension of any team!”

Rachael McGuickin,  
Director of Business Tourism,  
Visit Belfast



Number of delegates  
400  
Client  
Visit Belfast  
Date identified by SFA  
May 2012  
Date handed over to client  
June 2012  
Bid won/confirmed  
2013  
Year of conference  
2014  
Economic value to the city  
£500,000

Association conferences usually rotate to different parts of the world on a fairly predictable rotational pattern. ICCA, the International Congress and Convention Association, have a database that allows members to search for these association meetings and identify which are likely to come to a destination in the future. SFA’s team have the experience and expertise to quickly identify suitable conferences that could come to a city or destination. They are also particularly skilled at researching and identifying potential local ‘Ambassadors’, gathering crucial information to support a bid and then making introductions on behalf of clients to these individuals. This can be a lengthy and time consuming process but one – when done effectively - offers extremely good return on investment. This is an example of some successful research conducted by SFA.

### The Conference

The European Society for Mental Health and Deafness is an international Non-Government Organisation for the promotion of the positive mental health of deaf people in Europe. They hold a world Congress every three years with the host city chosen by the European Society. Brian Symington, retired director RNID received a Visit Belfast Ambassador of the Year award after successfully bidding for the conference in Lisbon in 2013 with Lindsey Williamson conference sales manager at Visit Belfast.

The sixth World Congress was held at Queen’s University. It was the first time the four-day event had been staged in the British Isles and attracted 400 delegates, worth £0.5M to the local economy. Visit Belfast undertook deaf awareness training for this event in order to service delegates to a high standard and to create a legacy.



### What did SFA do to help win this?

SFA identified this conference as a prospect for Belfast in early 2012. Following some desk research, they identified a potential Ambassador, Brian Symington. Although he had retired as a Director of Action for Hearing Loss, he had maintained his interest with the international society. Often the response from potential Ambassadors is slow as they are extremely busy people but with SFA’s gentle persistence Mr Symington did respond in June 2012 and proved to be an extremely valuable Ambassador. He agreed to a meeting with Visit Belfast which resulted in a bid that was won and confirmed in 2013.



As at October 2014, Visit Belfast have confirmed 21 of SFA’s leads since 2010 worth £16.1M and have a further 76 leads in development worth £77.1M.