

Oh, what a night!

THE ACT ANNUAL DINNER CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING FIXTURES IN THE FINANCIAL YEAR AND THIS OCCASION WAS NO EXCEPTION.



This has been a year of unprecedented uncertainty and volatility for treasurers and bankers with more still to come, but nearly 1,500 of them still managed to find their way to the ACT annual dinner in November.

Held as always in the vast ballroom at the Grosvenor House Hotel, Park Lane, in the heart of London's Mayfair, the evening was a heady mixture of entertainment and a great opportunity to network, with a thought-provoking element thrown in.

Comedian Dara O'Briain made it a night to remember. He refused to be put off his stride by the inclusion of a rogue winner in the prize draw and managed eventually to find a real lucky winner of a trip by helicopter to a celebrity chef's restaurant. Congratulations then to Suzanne Reynolds of Burberry, who won the prize, and to Katarzyna Tytz of Alliance Boots, who won the champagne diamonds draw.

By then O'Briain was well into his stride, having entertained attendees with a routine

that provoked plenty of laughter and, perhaps thankfully, made little reference to the current financial crisis.

But with the ballroom packed with treasurers, bankers, colleagues and guests it was not possible to escape from the turmoil in the markets altogether. Earlier in the evening ACT president James Douglas welcomed members and their guests before handing over the podium to Cyrus Ardalan. In his incisive speech, Ardalan, vice chairman and head of UK and EU public policy and government relations at Barclays, which sponsored the annual dinner, critically examined the prospects for financial regulation in the context of the financial crisis of the past few years.

But the most thought-provoking moment of the evening came when Carrie Herbert, chief executive and founder of the ACT-nominated charity, explained why she had started Red Balloon Learner Centre Group. Children forced to drop out of school because of bullying face a bleak future, with

little provision made by schools or local authorities to help them get their education back on track.

Convincing as Herbert was, the audience listened spellbound while charity beneficiary Emily Allen explained with clarity and poise how bullying may have spoilt a part of her school life but with the help of Red Balloon she had ensured it was not going to ruin the whole of her life.

Such powerful testimony helps explain why the annual dinner raised over £50,000 for the charity (and just under £5,000 was raised for the ACT Bursary scheme), although any audience told to dig deep by Herbert, a former teacher, would be wise to comply.

More on the charity Red Balloon Learner Centre Group can be found through the ACT website at www.treasurers.org/redballoon.

And, of course, when the formal dinner and the speeches were over, the night was still young. Networking went into overdrive, with the balcony bar a crush until well into the early hours.

