

# UKNOF 2021 Strategy

## Introduction

This paper reviews the business of UKNOF meetings in the light of changes due to the Covid 19 pandemic as well as addressing longer-term changes in our industry.

It sets out a strategy for UKNOF's navigation of the coming year, and makes suggestions as to how to achieve longer-term sustainability.

## Challenges Facing UKNOF

Long-term sustainability challenges. This section is mainly for information

- Meeting Sponsorship revenue has been reducing for some years, although Patron Sponsorship, covering a full financial year, has compensated for most of this. It still remains important to diversify revenue sources.
- For physical meetings of 50-70 attendees or more, donated venues are generally not available, requiring paid-for venues with advanced booking (sometimes 2-3 years to get availability) and professional event management.
- Hybrid meetings with less than 100 participants and donated venues could be cheaper than full physical meetings
- The costs of physical venues tends to be a step function, whereas the numbers attending is a continuous function. It requires careful judgment as to the size of the venue that might be needed for a future meeting. The cost of venues and catering is always increasing.

## Pandemic-specific challenges

- Revenue reduced by online meetings largely due to lower maximum fees chargeable for sponsorship packages.
- Only 1 or 2 sponsor slots in shorter online events.
- Cannot spread the load of running online events among a large team of volunteers, so more work for a small team, probably paid.
- Attendees and exhibitors are drawn by the social interactions and these are missing in online events.

## Observations and Analysis

Our team connects our community to valued content and the wider global Internet operations community.

We should emphasise the global nature of our content.

One of UKNOF's main unique selling points is the importance of our community

UKNOF should maintain the capability to help students, unfunded individuals, and others to attend events.

Physical meetings bring added value

Having the community meet face-to-face, with discussions and collaborations over lunch and coffee is seen as a vital part of UKNOF. Sponsors, who are exhibitors, also gain added value in the personal interaction and feedback from attendees.

Finding the balance between staying the course and need for radical thinking

We've learned a lot about running successful events in 15 years and much of that is still useful. Change costs resources so we must be cautious about throwing out what we've learned. And we still need to keep solvent.

Sustainability is one of UKNOF's biggest challenges

Since the start we've been using a "Not for Profit" structure but we have some significant costs. Personnel resources are the main costs and we have only survived by Denesh and Keith doing too much at too low a price. This cannot continue.

It is a common misconception that online meetings take less effort to organise.

Revenue will have to be found to cover the loss of sponsorship and increased venue costs referred to above. One possible model is an attendance charge but attendees will need to see some solid benefit from their payment. We are still discussing what this could be.

Any subscription model will of course require an appropriate subscriber management platform.

There are significant reservations about the idea of charging for everything

We don't generally want to charge for content. But it might be acceptable to give different access to content by paid subscribers and free subscribers. This could take the form of access to archived content or early content for payment and free access to streamed real-time content. The details still need to be worked out.

The path out of online-only pandemic events remains uncertain

In the long term (a year or more in the future) the glass is still cloudy. The future is likely to be more online than physical, with possibly a mix; a hybrid meeting. It is too early to say for certain.

## Key Strategic Principles

- Funding must remain diversified and relevant to those paying: patron and meeting sponsors and individual subscribers
- Such a subscribership model should be developed as soon as possible
- To add value to subscribers, some content may be limited to subscribers, perhaps on a time-limited basis, but the aim should be to make content available as widely as possible and as cheaply as possible, if not free
- We should aim to widen our audience by maintaining online access, hybrid meetings, even when physical meetings are possible.
- We should aim to return to physical meetings and their social gatherings as soon as the current health situation permits.
- Meetings should be aimed at the online participant
- The focus should not be limited to the UK

## 2021 Budget and Planning

There are sufficient funds to sustain UKNOF operations on a virtual-only event basis for 2021 without further income, or for a shorter period should migration to a hybrid virtual/physical meeting format happen during the course of 2021.

- There should be no registration charge for non-interactive online meetings
- There should be a registration charge for physical meetings
- There should be a registration charge for interactive hybrid online/physical meetings
- There are potentially 2 types of hybrid meeting:
  - *Interim*: speakers to an audience of many. We could potentially roll our own using existing platforms
  - *Full*: many to many audience/speaker interaction, will require outsourced platform, hence greater costs
- All of sponsorships, corporate patronages, and donations will be needed to keep income diverse
- Grant applications could be an option to get through the short-term
- A provisional 2021 timeline will need to be agreed with contingencies for online, hybrid and physical meetings, and migration between them as feasible.