

UKNOF 2021 Annual Report

2021 can be said to be the year in which UKNOF got the hang of running events and operating fully online, along with much of our industry and the wider world. We've run 3 such events this year, [UKNOF46](#), & [47](#) and a short [virtualUKNOF](#) event in August, all with attendance in the 100-180 person range, and consistently highly-rated content. UKNOF48 is imminent with over 100 people registered to attend in person, and another strong programme.

It has however been a very challenging year for UKNOF from a sustainability point of view. The UKIF Board developed a [Strategy](#) to keep UKNOF running early in the year, and this has helped guide us. One of the most important things that let us keep the lights on during the pandemic is the financial support of our Patrons, both individual and corporate, and I'd like to extend UKNOF's major appreciation of this to our Sponsors and to every one of you.

We've also seen something of a changing of the guard, with a number of long-standing UKNOF contributors taking a well-earned exit, and some new faces stepping up to help continue our mission. The [Communications Committee](#) is now well-established since its early 2020 start, and has implemented the long-overdue refresh of our website, with regular blog updates and more web content development planned.

Meeting Sustainability

Recognising the reduced value from the lack of in-person interaction, and that registration charging is a deterrent to a subset of the community and some sponsors, we've kept free of charge attendance available at all of 2021's events. However, the ability to raise sponsor funding at online-only events is very limited, and we knew going into 2021 that we had sufficient reserves from 2020 to allow us to get to the end of this year only, if we were to return to some kind of hybrid event format during the year.

I am excited that we get to do our first meeting with an in-person element, [UKNOF48](#), very shortly. Our original plan was to do this as a fully-hybrid event, so that people could participate equitably with either physical and/or online presence as suited their own personal circumstances and safety comfort level. However, while our venue, Manchester Central, has been extremely flexible and accommodating in slipping our original April 2020 commitment to them several times, it was clear this could not slip beyond November 2021 without significant financial penalty, and fortunate that this co-incided with improving pandemic numbers in the UK and a re-start of interest in in-person meetings.

Our challenge is that fully hybrid events are significantly more expensive than physical-only ones, and that while we had sufficient financial reserves to run UKNOF48 on this basis, doing so would completely deplete these, and make it quite difficult and risky to commit to any meetings for 2022.

We therefore took the decision to run UKNOF48 on as economical as basis as possible, using our existing platforms rather than 3rd-party ones for as much remote participation as feasible, and keeping catering costs down via measures like boxed lunches and a social cash bar. The team is doing a lot of new and extra work to support these arrangements, and we hope you will be patient and supportive as we work out this new way of operating.

Committees

There have been a number of changes to the composition of the Communications Committee (CC), tasked with UKNOF outreach and social media presence, over the course of the year. It now comprises 7 members including liaisons, with Rebecca Class-Peter our most recent volunteer to this team.

A Charter for the CC has been agreed, and one of the most important tasks it has taken on is re-development of the <https://www.uknof.org.uk> main website, a project that had been stuck in the weeds for too many years, and that I am pleased to report has seen major progress during this year.

The Programme Committee (PC) has also seen some changes. We are sorry to see the departure of long-standing UKNOF stalwarts Mike Hughes and Chris Russell, without which UKNOF would simply not be

where it is today. Mike's contribution to UKNOF was vastly more than just being a Board and PC member, and we know he still has our back. Chris was our longest-serving PC Chair, and made major efforts bringing in outstanding content with his no-nonsense approach. Mike and Chris were also both instrumental in moving the new website project forward, they will both be missed. I am sure you will join me in expressing our heartfelt thanks to both Chris and Mike and wish them the very best for the future.

In line with the CC, a Charter is being worked on to more formally define the structure and operation of the Programme Committee, and we plan to share this more widely shortly.

The PC has a Chair, and two Co-Chairs, with the latter stepping up after Chris' departure to cover until a new Chair was appointed. I'm pleased to report that James Bensley, one of our more recent PC members brings his experience in running NetLdn to become the new PC Chair. The PC Chair has observer status at Board meetings, and James will attend these on a regular basis going forwards. Fearghas McKay continues as one of the PC Co-Chairs, joined by Marek Isalski, who will be serving jointly with outgoing existing Co-Chair Cathy Almond until she retires in February 2022.

Governance

The formal legal entity for running UKNOF is UKIF Ltd, a non-profit *Company Limited by Guarantee*, which has a Board of around 6 Directors. This Board has been meeting monthly since mid-2020, with regular reports from each meeting to the various committees.

As we operate neither critical services, big budgets, nor essential resources, UKNOF employs a lightweight governance model. A property of this is that the UKIF Ltd Board is appointed rather than elected. During the UKIF Ltd AGM in October, Willie Black and Steve Dyer were re-appointed as Directors by rotation for further 3-year terms, though they remain willing to step down before their terms are up should suitable successors come forward.

Another of our Board Directors, Liz Stevens, resigned from the UKIF Board in June, for personal/career development reasons. In the time between then and the AGM, we've been continuing our search for further Board Directors.

We remain very mindful of succession planning, and the need for fresh and preferably diverse blood. To this end I am delighted that the PC put forward Laura Winters as their nomination for the PC-appointed seat on the UKIF Board, which was confirmed at the UKIF AGM. We welcome Laura, and remain open and seeking for new Board members to step up from the community as UKIF Directors.

I am sure you will join me in wishing Liz thanks for all that she has done for UKNOF and for her future success.

For myself, I've now been involved with UKNOF since I founded it 17 years ago, and am not getting any younger. While I have no intention of quitting the Internet industry soon, I have set myself the personal target of stepping back from my executive roles by one year from now, Oct/Nov 2022, including as Managing Director of UKIF/UKNOF. I do however plan to remain involved, by continuing as a non-executive Board Director beyond that as long as appropriate.

To this end, we are currently seeking individuals that would be willing to become new Board members. The established process is that before any such individuals are appointed, the Board will consult with the committees on these appointments to ensure they have the confidence of the community. Please contact any Board member if you are interested in volunteering to serve, or wish to suggest a candidate.

2022 Plans

We would normally have a London-based meeting in January of the coming year, but with UKNOF48 being postponed to later in 2021, there is a shorter time between November and January than the usual ~4-month spacing of meetings. There also remains some uncertainty about how much funds we will finish UKNOF48 with at this point, though we are seeing good interest in sponsors for in-person meetings in 2022. The extent to which the pandemic will recede or not over the winter and holiday season remains uncertain,

We have therefore decided the best plan is to hold our next meeting with an in-person element as

UKNOF49 in Manchester in April 2022. This will allow us to:

- Avoid any pandemic surge during the winter months
- Have additional time to secure content and finalise sponsors
- Make use of an existing venue commitment

To avoid a long gap between events, we will also hold a short half-day virtualUKNOF event in late February/early March, The PC will open the Call for Presentations for this shortly. We plan to have UKNOF50 as an in-person meeting around the usual September timeframe, and hope to return to London events as early as we are able.

The purpose of UKNOF's annual meetings is not just to report to our committee stakeholders, but also to seek guidance and input from the community that supports us. We're open to suggestions and feedback on how we might best embrace the challenges and opportunities of the coming year.

Finally, I'd like to take the chance to thank everyone, not least those who give their valuable time and money, but also our wider community, for sticking with UKNOF to the point where we can see better times ahead. I look forward to seeing many of you in Manchester for the first time in too long, while recognising we're not quite done with this thing yet, and for others of you it will have to wait. Please take care, and let's continue UKNOF's mission of keeping the UK Internet working well for everyone.

Keith Mitchell
UKIF Managing Director
November 2021