

TOGETHER TOWARDS TOMORROW



By Peter Swabey

For many of us, life during the pandemic has represented a significant change from our normal work patterns, from the way in which we do our jobs and, indeed, the way in which we think about them.

For those of us at ProShare, this has been more than averagely interesting over the last few months as we grappled first with the knowledge that the conference would have to be very different from previous years, next as we realized that it would have to be a wholly virtual event, and then as we looked at the individual changes that this would bring and, in some cases the opportunities that they would carry with them. It also meant doing things in a completely new, different and, at least to a degree, untested way which did absolutely no favours for the blood pressure of any of us closely involved.

And as we worked our way through the thinking process, we were focussed too on two principal aims: that the conference should maintain the high standard of previous ProShare conferences and that we should not simply replicate a physical conference online but that we should seek to take advantage of the online environment wherever we could. That meant extra work for us, but for our speakers too, for whom a virtual 'onboarding' process, to check that they could access the platform and that their presentation worked, was essential. It also meant extra work for our sponsors, our Headline Sponsor, Shareworks by Morgan Stanley; our Gold Sponsor, Computershare; and our Silver Sponsors Equiniti and Shareforce – because for them it was not a question of simply turning up on the day, or the evening before, erecting a stand and opening a couple of boxes of brochures and goodies but a complete rethink of how they would engage with delegates and, in some cases, the drafting of new online collateral to support the event. We are grateful to them all for their willingness to think outside the box and work with us in such a different way.

Come the day, and I will admit to nerves. In spite of all the preparation, in spite of all the testing, in spite of the confidence of having used the app for the Institute's charity governance conference, it was still slightly nerve-racking. But those I have spoken to since the event have all been hugely complimentary. There were, inevitably, a few 'moments' – one speaker couldn't connect, in spite of having been able to do so the previous day in rehearsal; some delegates struggled with sound, or

vision, or both and we are sorry that was the case – but for almost everyone it worked and it was great to see so many people talking share plans in the chat rooms established during the regular stretch or refreshment breaks built in throughout the day. I thought that there were some fascinating, and really insightful, sessions during the day and we are grateful to all our speakers for giving their time and expertise, and for putting up with the challenges of onboarding and the technical challenges that this presented for some of them.

The challenge now is how we make the most of the work done. The conference sessions were recorded and are now all available to delegates and they still have time, through the app, to get in touch with speakers and fellow delegates – and with our sponsors – to build on learning and do that networking which was, I think, the element that we all most missed from the physical event. Delegates can also catch up on those sessions that they missed – with four streams throughout the day, I certainly had to make some tough choices.

For those who couldn't – or didn't – join us, we will be making some of the conference sessions available as separate webinars throughout the year, so watch this space. Finally, I'd like to thank the home team – both the Institute Events team, led by Kate and Lai, who did so much work to bring the virtual conference to life and Nikki at ProShare who sorted out all the administration. I'd also like to welcome Murray Tompsett, who joined us as the new Head of ProShare on the Monday after the conference, but who was able to join us at the event and introduce himself to some of the delegates. I know that he will be speaking to many more members over the coming months.