

# Chairman's Thoughts 2017

## *A Year in FLOSS*

This is the first time that I have written a yearly retrospective for the FLOSSUK Membership and wider audience. Last year was the final year for Kimball Johnson who had served as Chair for two terms before passing on the mantle. It was my job to continue the change that Kimball had started and to take the organisation to a new destination, and this may yet prove to be its final destination.

FLOSSUK was originally, and still legally, UKUUG (United Kingdom Unix User Groups) trading as FLOSSUK, the name and identity change was brought about by a need to recognise that the environment had changed and with it the membership and focus of the conferences. For many years the FLOSSUK Spring Conference was seen as merely a System Administrator's event. However technology marches on and soon it was rebranded as DevOps as more software automation at the server level brought a change in the administrators and those who could administer. So our name now reflected the Free and Libre Open Source Software

As I became more involved with FLOSSUK we started to look at that name and our events. We realised there was a dramatic political and social change in both rights and hardware. There was a growing Maker movement that was spurred on by the introduction of 3D printing, low cost lasers and the ubiquitous small computers. The era of the Arduino, RaspberryPi, MicroBit and the many small components comprising the loosely named Internet of Things had arrived.

This change was dramatic and is still rolling forwards at an incredible pace. Our mission now was to reflect this new world. A world where a DoS attack could be made using just household electronics such as light bulbs.

Once again our name evolved to reflect this, or rather the acronym evolved. FLOSSUK represented Free and Open Technologies. Those technologies could be hardware, software or the digital rights that are affected by such. We embraced the notion that FLOSS easily stood for Free and Libre Open Source Systems. It is the whole area of community, shared, and the removal of barriers to access that inspired us, and it was those that we should now reflect.

In the past year we have also started to finalise the long process of automation for the organisation. In March our long-standing secretary Jane retired. This was a tremendous upheaval in the management of FLOSSUK and one that we are finally seeing the end results from. Jane was a great member of the organisation and unofficially the ninth member of council. She oversaw the entire infrastructure for close to two decades and moving on from her stewardship has been a challenge. However we as council

feel we have streamlined and improved some of the process to make it easier to manage as we move into the future.

## **But what does that future hold?**

It has become clear to council that as the world has moved on and changed, so to have our membership. There is a different sense these days of what an organisation can charge for, or more what that charge represents. In the past people paid membership simply to belong to an organisation that provided events at a discount. But the modern world does not wholly reflect such behaviour. In this we must look to change as well. The next challenge for council will be to change how we view our membership. To see paying members as patrons of the organisation, their funds are literally the life-blood that allows us to exist and to create an open environment. We must embrace sponsors not as event elements but as organisational partners, helping them to exist in this open landscape. We must also embrace our community by allowing affiliate membership and affiliate organisations, where their support is what matters and where even a fiscal barrier to entry can be removed.

The next year in the life of FLOSSUK may prove to be its most dramatic. It is as the old proverb says 'Interesting times'. We as council hope that we can change to bring something of value into this new world. Our primary purpose we feel is that we can engender a community spirit by supporting events, holding meetings, camps and conferences and joining people together. The council see the future of FLOSSUK as bringing people together in the real world and to lowering the barriers that prevent this from happening. The support of our paying members, sponsors and other community affiliates will be crucial to making this a success. We, as volunteers, will always rely on and be grateful to our members for their continuing support to help guide us on the right path.

Please join us at our flagship conference in Edinburgh in April of 2018. It promises to be an exciting year and we hope to bring you an amazing event packed with quality talks, workshops and more importantly the chance to meet friends old and new.