



The Future of Share Plans

Earlier this month we welcomed 350+ share plans professionals and industry experts to etc. venues County Hall, overlooking Westminster and the River Thames, for our annual employee share plans conference. This was our best-attended conference yet.

This year's conference theme was 'The Future of Share Plans' and almost one hundred speakers and presenters took the audience through a variety of topics including blockchain, Augmented Reality, robotic process automation, financial wellbeing, the gender pay gap, global restructuring, corporate actions, 2017's AGM season trends, MiFID II, GDPR, MAR, communications, executive pay governance and financial wellbeing.

Keynote speakers

We were lucky to secure Nicola Horlick, CEO of Money&Co as our morning keynote speaker, and delegates were treated to a wide-ranging and insightful 30 minute speech, entirely without notes or prompts. The issue of the day, Brexit, and its potential impact upon the economy and British business, was analysed and dissected with forensic precision. Globalisation, with all its opportunities and challenges, was also covered, with salutary lessons of the UK's long-gone textile industry. The need to focus on getting greater female representation in STEM subjects as a feeder for industry, and encouraging children of all backgrounds to learn how to code, rather than just use the latest tech gadgets, was emphasised.

It was an honour to welcome our afternoon keynote speaker, Dame Stephanie Shirley, to the stage. Dame Stephanie came to the UK as a child refugee in the 'Kindertransport' of 1939 and became a highly successful businesswoman and philanthropist, having given away £67m of her personal wealth to date. Dame Stephanie took us through a whistle-stop tour of her career as one of the very first female IT entrepreneurs, from the founding of her business, Freelance Programmers, in the 1960s, later FI Group, to its listing in 1996 and name change to Xansa in 2001, and in 2007 its acquisition via scheme of arrangement and de-listing by French company Sopra Steria.

The company was initially set up in 1962 with £6 of capital; in 2007 it turned over £379m. It programmed supersonic Concorde's 'black box' flight recorder, and later partnered with Renault F1. The fact that Dame Stephanie had insisted on placing large amounts of her company's equity into the hands of her employees meant that many became paper millionaires as a result of the listing.

For reasons of expediency Dame Stephanie adopted the first name 'Steve' in order to secure business development appointments with the gatekeepers of the then male-dominated business world, and even had to get her husband to open her company's bank accounts. It is therefore ironic, to say the least, that her company policy of employing as programmers mostly women (who needed to work largely from home) had to change when the Sex Discrimination legislation came into effect in the 1970s. As she says, "we had to let the men in" to the company.

"My motivation is to help improve the lives of others less fortunate than ourselves and to encourage those whom fortune has favoured to give generously and with a joyous heart."

Dame Stephanie stayed on after her speech to sign copies of her autobiography, *Let IT Go*, with proceeds going to the charity Autistica. The book is due to be made into a film; and if you haven't yet watched Dame Stephanie's TED Talk, do: <http://www.steveshirley.com/>

Plenary sessions

The gender pay gap reporting regulations were the central topic for our afternoon keynote panel discussion, expertly chaired by Janet Cooper OBE of Tapestry Compliance, with panellists Ann Govier, Head of Executive Remuneration & Share Schemes at Marks & Spencer, Helene Reardon-Bond, formerly of the Government's Equalities Office and now an adviser to businesses, and Dr. Zara Nanu, CEO of tech start-up firm Gapsquare.

Research

Our morning plenary session focussed on the key findings from ProShare's research report 'Attitudes to Employee Share Ownership', sponsored by YBS Share Plans, SecondSight and WEALTH At Work. Employees from eleven FTSE-listed companies participated in a survey and interviews which sought to analyse attitudes to employee share ownership by gender, age demographic, seniority and length of service. The full version of this ground-breaking and insightful report is due out next week and all ProShare members will receive a free copy.

Sponsors

Major sponsors of the conference, YBS Share Plan, had a fantastic stand in the exhibition space where delegates could take part in a virtual reality experience. Ashley Price, YBS' Head of Share Plans, stated in his opening address 'When Gabbi shared the topic for this year's conference "The Future of Share Plans", it couldn't have been more fitting, as this statement is a permanent agenda item for us. We are always looking forward to ensure our customers are able to interact with us in the way they choose, this means we are continuously challenging our digital roadmap so we can deliver the best possible customer experience.'

Digital sponsors Equatex were key supporters of our conference app, which was accessed 4,850 times by delegates during the conference, with the average visit lasting 98.4 seconds.

Barclays, Computershare, Equiniti, Intertrust, Sanne, Solium and Zedra were **supporting sponsors**; Baker McKenzie, Capita Asset Services, Fidelity Investments, Global Shares, KPMG, SecondSight, ShareGift, Tapestry Compliance and WEALTH at work were **exhibiting sponsors**.

Prize winners

Alex Kenvyn of Solium was the lucky winner of the ProShare prize for posting the best photo on the activity stream of our conference app, winning a bottle of champagne and our book bag which contained:

- The New Digital Age by Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen (Director of Google Ideas)
- Lean In by Sheryl Sandberg (COO, Facebook)
- Let IT Go by Dame Stephanie Shirley
- Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek, and
- The ladybird book of The Meeting.

Teresa James of J Sainsbury won the ProShare 'earlybird' conference registration prize of £250 of 'Mr & Mrs Smith' vouchers.

Julie Shepherd of Sage won a fitbit for successfully completing our in-App game.

The conference day was rounded off with a drinks reception generously sponsored by Barclays Global Stock & Reward Services and Solium.

Thank you

A very big thank you to everyone who sponsored, exhibited, presented and attended our 2017 conference – none of this would be possible without your support. Roll on 2018!