



Dear AV enthusiast,

This is the first Festival News for the 2021 Festival and the news is positive as there will be a Festival this year. The RPS AV Group Committee has considered both the pros and cons, the insurance and the responsibility of the Director of the Festival and it has decided that this year it will be an online event.

Rather than just announce the decision I want to outline the issues that the Committee considered as follows:

- At this time, we do not know what the restrictions or conditions will be in September, but we have heard that “the pandemic is not over” and “we will need to continue to be cautious”.
- What would be the role of the school where we held the last two Festival? The school hall will be available but would be entirely the organiser’s responsibility to run the event in line with the Government’s requirements at the time. Failure to do so would leave the organiser liable for a £10,000 fine.
- Would the RPS indemnify the Director related to Covid on top of the public liability insurance the event would normally have in place as I do not want to put myself at risk of being sued should anything go wrong?
- Who would agree and set out my duty of care?
- Would I have to insist that everyone could prove they had been vaccinated twice, or produce a negative test result, which I would be responsible for checking? I would also be responsible for making sure people would socially distance. The event would have to provide sanitiser and marshals to ensure there was compliance.

I have taken soundings from some regular attenders and the general feeling ranges from they would probably attending with a heavy heart, to varying degrees of reluctance, to would definitely not be prepared to attend.

Providing tea/coffee, lunch and meals at a live event would bring an additional set of problems. Would we all have to be seated and wear masks if we left our tables, assuming there would be space to have this arrangement?

If we did have a live event and the situation changed so that the event had to be cancelled there are additional issues. Refunds for the accommodation booked by

both individuals and the Committee. Refunds for session bookings made which were paid for by credit card, PayPal, BACS and cheque would generate a lot of work.

There are currently larger event trials being done in controlled conditions, with restricted numbers, everyone being tested, risk assessments carried out, marshals, one-way systems, sanitisers and probably more than I do not even know about. We have not seen the results of those trials but they may have an effect on the rules at the time.

We need and aim for 100 people sitting on seats and with reluctance and potential social distancing plus non-attendance, we estimate that we may get only 35 attending. With this in mind we considered what the atmosphere would be like, and that it would be a huge amount of work for just 35 people.

With regard to judging, my feeling is that having invited an Italian AV worker to judge, the event would have to be prejudged or we would have to find a judge with suitable language skills and FIAP approval for a new judge.

I do hope you feel that we have fully considered the situation and that the decision to hold an online Festival is the right one.

Now that the decision and explanation is made, it is time to look at the positive side and there are many positives:

- More people overall and people from many countries will be able to see the Royal Photographic Society's premier International Audio Visual Festival.
- The use of breakout rooms in Zoom pioneered by Jill Bunting and John Smith have improved the social side considerably.
- The Retrospective and the Great Northern celebration of 2020 proved both popular and successful so there is a smaller learning curve this time.
- Lunch tea/coffee and evening meal is easy!
- There is no driving involved so the carbon footprint will be minimised.

I appreciate that the AVs will never be as good as shown on a 16ft x 9ft screen and with a fabulous sound system, but they will all be shown and judged on equally good devices.

So, taking the positives please put the 24th, 25th and 26th September 2021 in your diaries as we plan to hold the event over that weekend. More details to follow in due course.

Edgar Gibbs FRPS, MPAGB, AV-AFIAP
Festival Director