

Response to Consultation
Proposed Nominet Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

What principles should a Nominet Foundation be based on?

When Sir Tim Berners Lee created the World Wide Web, he did not ask for anything in return, he wanted it to be freely available to everyone.

TIME Magazine once wrote of Sir Tim, "he took a powerful communications system that only the elite could use and turned it into a mass medium." TIME also wrote that he, more than anyone else, has fought to keep the Web open, non-proprietary, and free.

When Nominet was founded in 1996, it was founded in the interests of everyone, *as in every stakeholder*. I believe a Nominet Foundation should be built on the same principle; that it be freely available to everyone, *every stakeholder*, and every stakeholder should have at least an equal opportunity to benefit from a Nominet Foundation's resources. This does not mean that all stakeholders are equal, many become unequal through their own endeavours, but it does mean that all stakeholders should at least have an equal opportunity to put their case before a Nominet Foundation.

What is the Web really about?

In a recent blog, Sir Tim Berners Lee referred to the interaction of the Net and the Web. "The Net links computers, the Web links documents". He wrote that the realisation now is that "it's not the documents, it is the things they are about that are important".

So what should a Nominet Foundation be about?

Funding academic research seems to be a consistent theme running through a number of consultation responses. In itself, this may be a worthwhile aim, but before one can suggest *who* a Nominet Foundation should sponsor or fund, I think one needs to think in terms of *everyone*, and not just in terms of *some*, and especially not just in terms of the elite.

I think therefore that *who* it is set up to serve, and *what* it defines its objectives as, are critical to the long-term credibility of the Foundation itself. I believe it should serve everyone, as in every stakeholder, and it therefore needs to ensure its objectives are not written in such a way as to exclude any sector or individual stakeholder from benefiting from the resources available. This may sound obvious and simplistic, but we already know from experience, how policy written with the best intentions, can work against those it was purportedly written to serve.

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THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

Question 1: What do you think about the proposal for a Nominet Foundation?

In principle it is an admirable proposal with exceptional possibilities.

Question 2: What are your views on the types of potential beneficiaries and are there any you would like added to this list?

I do not think the types of beneficiaries are important at this stage, except they should be internet related, but I do think it is important to allow free access to the process of applying to a Nominet Foundation for a grant or subsidy, so that each application can be judged on its own merits and not some pre-defined set of rules that may, inadvertently, lack the vision to be all encompassing.

Question 3: What projects or organisations are you aware of that could benefit from a grant from the Nominet Foundation?

I think it should be incumbent on the Foundation to proactively seek out worthwhile projects and organisations to ensure all sectors of the community (even the less well informed) benefit from the funds and expertise available. There are many small, under-funded organisations in the UK who make up in enthusiasm what they lack in finances. These organisations may already have built huge networks of contacts within similar projects and organisations and through them, a substantial number of potential benefactors - people and communities who could benefit from the resources of a Nominet Foundation. The Foundation may find it mutually beneficial to collaborate with some of these smaller organisations who may already have identified worthwhile community projects that need funding.

If the aim is to reach out and educate, where better to start than to build an education program in our primary and secondary schools. However, let us not forget our Senior Citizens. There are many who would like to get more involved with computers and the internet but who find the prospect daunting. This is a deserving stakeholder group who would benefit immensely from the resources of a Nominet Foundation.

Question 4: What other comments do you have?

If Nominet wishes to sustain credibility in the wider community, it has to put its Foundation out there among them. Many of those who deserve to be helped won't even know a Nominet Foundation exists. It should be part of the Foundation's responsibilities to seek out and identify projects that deserve the kind of education and financial support it can offer, and which many of the 'better informed' take for granted. Let's do our best to get to all stakeholders so the Foundation can do the most good where and when it seems most appropriate.

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