

Founders Challenge 2022 – Report

This year was the first in-person Founders Challenge since 2019 because of Covid. For the second time the event used the route introduced in 2019. Due to the time gap between in-person events, resulting from Covid, planning the event held a lot of uncertainties, notably anticipation of take-up, availability of marshals, communication with new managers at both indoor checkpoints and negotiation with the National Trust over land access.

Sign up for the event was slower than in 2019 and previous years, which impacted the ordering of the main meal as the caterers had a minimum order number of 140. At the end of August only 80 had signed up for the event in spite of booking having been open for three months. This left a shortfall of 60 on the ordering numbers. Instead of risking the outlay of a minimum order with the caterers, the main meal was catered in-house and consisted of a pasta meal and pudding served within 7 minutes of ordering at a cost of £1.75 a head instead of the £6.50 budgeted for the outside caterer. Only food that was ordered by the walkers was prepared and charged for, effectively giving us a sale or return basis. Bringing the catering in-house allowed greater control of the budget, especially with the uncertainties we faced overall this year. This removed the fixed 47% of the budget set aside for the meal, allowing the financial flexibility to cope with the late announcement of train strikes for the day of the event.

Two weeks from the event 130 participants had signed up, but following the announcement of the rail strike it was no longer certain how many would be able to travel to it, or whether it would be possible to marshal it sufficiently. Once it was ascertained there were sufficient marshals available to man the mid-point checkpoints if only minimum snacks and drinks were provided there, we assessed the likely drop-out rate from the tone of emails received following the strike announcement, calculated the sum left from the fees after the fixed costs of venues and access had been deducted and estimated what refunds could be offered to participants without leaving the group with a loss. Participants who were no longer able to access the event were offered a £10 refund while those who chose to attend the event with reduced provision at the checkpoints were offered a £5 refund. In the event 15 notified they were pulling out. Of those entitled to refunds 33 chose to donate their refund to the group as a mark of appreciation that the event was still happening. This resulted in an unexpected additional profit of £165. The event netted a profit of £1,155.22 before payment of the non-member surcharge to the national IT fund, which payment should leave a total in excess of £800 for allocation within the group. This profit is higher than expected as the drop-out rate was lower than anticipated, due to enthusiasm for the event.

On the day, we had a total of 13 marshals across all aspects of the event. Some marshals doubled up on duties, some staying longer than originally scheduled. One in particular stayed an extra two hours. All marshals were thanked with a card for their time and effort across the day.

99 participants started the event, with 94 completing within the time allowed. Judging from comments at headquarters afterwards, everyone appeared to have enjoyed the route and were pleased that the event had not been cancelled because of the strike.

As this is the first in-person event I have organized, with all the challenges this year, some lessons have been learnt for coming years, notably the need to address the method used to recruit marshals, the importance of Pacer at mid-points (unavailable this year through lack of operators), and the best method of serving the in-house meal should we decide to cater in-house again.

I would like to thank all the marshals on the day and everyone who helped with the organization of the event in any way, without whom the event could not and would not have happened.

Planning for 2023

All the necessary halls have now been booked for Saturday 21st October 2023. We have delayed the event to the 21st in order to accommodate some of our most long-standing marshals who were unable to make 7th October. All former marshals, supporters, and key role holders for the event have been notified and their availability has been confirmed.

Planning for the event is well in hand and I hope it will run smoothly this year.

I will be issuing requests for Marshals later in the year. If you know you are available and would like to help, please put the date in your diary and let me know at chris.founders.challenge@gmail.com.