



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Festival of Politics 2022 Report

19 January 2023

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 5

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this Paper is to provide the SPCB with a summary of the 2022 Festival of Politics.

Background

2. As agreed by the SPCB the 2022 Festival took place in-person but built on the successes of the two previous online Festivals and also included online events. Held over three days, between Thursday 11 and Saturday 13 August 2022 there were 19 in-person events and three online events.
3. The Festival programme responded to contemporary political issues and social affairs, including the cost-of living crisis; trust and politics; information and disinformation in the media; female political representation; migration and the climate crisis. Additionally, In Conversation events with philosopher and academic Professor A.C Grayling; and with poet, writer and broadcaster Lemn Sissay took place. An In Conversation with the footballer turned commentator John Barnes was cancelled.
4. The Festival brought together academics, policymakers, former politicians and current Members, actors, care-experienced people, and members of the LGBTI and elder care community to debate the topics cited in the paragraph above. The panel content was highlighted by survey respondents for its 'empowering' 'informative' and 'thought-provoking' panellist contributions and chairing skills.
5. The opening day of the Festival was programmed in partnership with eight Cross-Party Groups and the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, all of whom responded to the Festival's open call to participate.
6. The partnership with the parliament's think-tank Scotland's Futures Forum continued with both Teams collaborating on several events this year. The Festival partnership allows both the Festival and the Futures Forum to broaden

respective audiences and support the goal of long-term thinking in the Parliament and Scotland more broadly.

7. The Festival partnered with eight further organisations according to their associated subject or academic specialism in relation to the panel discussion topic. They included the National Theatre of Scotland; David Hume Institute; John Smith Centre, University of Glasgow; the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights; Scotland's International Development Alliance; Elect Her; the University of Aberdeen; and *The Times* newspaper.
8. The Festival Café Bar also hosted a programme of live acoustic music with local musicians and three exhibitions. The exhibitions included the Portraits of an LGBTI+ Generation photographs and video linked to the National Theatre of Scotland partnership panel on elder care. The Court of the Lord Lyon hosted an exhibition to mark their 350th anniversary inviting audiences to design their own heraldic device; and the third installation was the Cubes of Perpetual Light, held in partnership with the Dandelion Festival. This exhibition celebrated growing, music and community with the towered vertical farms and stood in the Members' Garden for the duration of the Festival and the Edinburgh International Culture Summit.

Issues and Options

Evaluation

9. This year's Festival took place against a unique and challenging backdrop for all of Edinburgh's August festivals; with a reported downturn in projected ticket sales attributed to a variety of factors: including the cost-of-living crisis; city accommodation costs; COVID 19; and train strikes.
10. Given these external factors, like other festivals overall attendance numbers for 2022 were down compared with the previous in-person Festivals. However, those previous Festivals had more panel sessions including Chamber events, so it is difficult to compare like with like. For example, in 2019 there were over 1,800 attendees whilst in 2022 there was over 1,100.
11. However, it is worth noting that given our key learnings from the two online Festivals in 2020 and 2021, we have been able to expand our audience reach beyond those who can attend on the day by creating free-to-access Festival resources. In addition, to those that attended the 'live' events an additional 1,300 people have viewed the 12 Festival events filmed in The Holyrood Room through YouTube; and a further 350 have downloaded podcasts of the Professor AC Grayling and Lemn Sissay events. These new resources – like the videos and podcasts – provide longevity to the Festival sessions, ensuring the Festival content continues to be consumed by audiences across Scotland and beyond. As of November 2022, this equates to additional 1,650 people engaging with the content since August.
12. As with previous in-person Festivals we conducted a paper survey of those attending in-person events. A higher percentage of these that attended in 2022

completed the paper survey (422) compared to those in 2019 (585). Attendees were asked to rate the event, provide their age, indicate whether they had attended before and how they found out about the Festival with an option for additional comments. The survey showed that there were no significant variations between the 2019 and 2022. However, there was an increase in the number of those who completed the survey indicating that they had previously attended a Festival. In 2022 just 50% of those completing the survey had attended before up from 44% in 2019. This would seem to indicate a growing loyalty with our festivalgoers and interest in the Festival programme content.

Public Engagement Strategy

13. The Festival supported the Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy by breaking down barriers through engaging and partnering with a diverse range of organisations and audiences to create panel discussions and events. In particular, the partnerships with the Cross-Party Groups offered an insight into a diverse range of new issues from Prostitution; to End of Life Choices; and WASPI women. This novel approach was successful in attracting wider and more diverse audiences who may not previously have attended the Festival.
14. In addition to the Cross-Party Groups, we were able through other key partnerships to attract new and more diverse audiences. For example, through a complimentary ticket allocation to organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland with whom the Festival team approached to partner on the National Theatre of Scotland's rehearsed reading and panel discussion with care experienced people we were able to ensure a wider and more diverse audience. The National Theatre of Scotland's own LGBTI+ group generated a small, safe and therefore very personal and well-received panel discussion on care for the older LGBTI+ community and a photographic exhibition titled, Portraits of an LGBTI+ Generation in the Festival café Bar.
15. The Festival Team also worked with colleagues in the Participation and Communities Team to offer complimentary tickets to the Open Book Group at the Grassmarket Recovery Project to attend events on Thursday's Festival programme. The Group fed back that a future initiative would be welcome and underlined the importance of feeling well 'looked after' by parliamentary staff on the day.

BSL

16. The Events and Exhibitions Team once again worked with the Parliament's BSL Officer in advance to ensure that the BSL community chose the events they wanted to see interpreted as part of the Festival programme. A total of seven in-person and online events (End-of-Life Choices; Disability and Employment; Elect Her; Scotland, Racism and the Transatlantic Slavery; LGBTI Elder Care; National Theatre of Scotland's Holding/Holding On; and Care, Love and Understanding) were interpreted this year.

Communications Activity

17. As with the wider Festival our communications activity focused on working with partner organisations to spread the message of the Festival and our panel sessions. This included pulling together a toolkit with graphics for each of the events for partners to use to promote the individual events. We also had a Festival wide marketing plan which focused on raising awareness of the Festival itself across several different platforms. In addition, a large part of this was using social media to effectively target events to those with an interest in the individual topics. In August we are competing with several other leading Festivals that feature key political issues and high-profile speakers.
18. As mentioned above, repurposing Festival content has been a key strategic focus this year in order to expand on the reach of the Festival. The Parliament Communications Office created links and edited events that were filmed for partners to use to expand the reach of that event by using it on their platforms. We have also continued to use and promote Festival panel sessions on the Scottish Parliament's channels including trying to tie in relevant sessions with current and topical issues, such as the climate session with COP27.

Governance

19. As previously agreed, the programme for the 2022 Festival was developed by parliamentary officials in consultation with the Clerk/Chief Executive and the Presiding Officer.

Resource Implications

20. The total budget allocated for the 2022 Festival was £55k which included all direct costs associated with holding the event including audio visual, Festival Café Bar including performers' fees, design, marketing, travel and accommodation, additional staffing and catering. Through very tight management of resources and in particular the reduction of travel and accommodation costs for participants we were able to bring the Festival in slightly under budget at £52k.

Publications Scheme

21. This paper can be published.