



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Festival of Politics 2023 Report

By correspondence

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 71

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the SPCB with a summary of the 2023 Festival of Politics.

Background

2. As agreed by the SPCB, the 2023 Festival took place in-person with all events filmed and broadcast 'as live' on sptv with the recorded links now available to view on the Festival of Politics website. Held over the three days between Wednesday 9 and Friday 11 August, with a final closing event taking place on Friday 25 August, there were 26 events in total.
3. The Festival programme responded to contemporary political, ethical and social issues, including ethics in artificial intelligence; the future of Scotland's arts and culture sector; migration; global citizenship; the climate crisis; and cheap food and mental health. Additionally, *In Conversation with ...* events with broadcaster, writer and former politician Michael Portillo; with the world's premier solo percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie OBE; and with one of the world's foremost music conductors, Gustavo Dudamel, all took place in the Debating Chamber over the four days.
4. The Festival brought together 19 Members who chaired panel discussions and *In Conversation with ...* events, and academics, policymakers, young people, performers, business leaders and musicians to all debate the issues presented in this year's programme.
5. As with previous years, the Festival worked in partnership with ten Cross-Party Groups; and the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, all of whom responded to the Festival's open call to participate to programme nine

- different panel events (the Cross-Party Groups on Inflammatory Bowel Disease and Health Inequalities partnered on one event).
6. The partnership with the Parliament's think-tank Scotland's Futures Forum continued with both Teams collaborating on several events and Futures Forum Board member Maggie Chapman MSP chairing a Festival event on the ethics of AI. Futures Forum officials also collaborated with the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee on a Festival debate on land use, which has since led to a larger Futures Forum event to support the RAI Committee and the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee in their scrutiny of forthcoming legislation. The partnership allows both the Festival and Scotland's Futures Forum to broaden respective audiences and support the goal of long-term thinking in the Parliament and Scotland generally.
 7. The Festival's other main partner was Edinburgh International Festival with whom it partnered for the first time on a series of events that explored fundamental questions posed by Dr Martin Luther King Jr's final book *Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community?* The partnership events included two of the *In Conversation with ...* events (Dame Evelyn Glennie and Gustavo Dudamel) and the panel discussion, The future of arts and culture in Scotland – Where do we go from here? Three additional partnership events took place at The EIF's Hub with discussion panels titled: Exploring community over chaos; Exploring hope in the face of adversity; and Exploring a perspective that's not of one's own. This was a very successful partnership allowing the Festival to widen its audience and reach.
 8. The Festival also partnered with nine further organisations according to their associated subject or academic specialism in relation to the panel discussion topic. They included the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER); the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Glasgow Caledonia; the John Smith Centre; the David Hume Institute; Scottish Youth Parliament; and the Scottish Council on Global Affairs.
 9. A new partnership with the Scottish Youth Film Foundation proved successful and it is hoped this will develop in future years. There is more information about the partnership below.
 10. The Festival Café Bar also hosted a programme of live music with a diverse range of musicians and dancers including the Ukrainian Children's Choirs Harmony and Energy; the Nikkan Indian Dance Academy; and the Edinburgh Chinese Creative Arts dancers. The exhibitions included a curated partnership exhibition with Glasgow Women's Library from their Grit and Diamonds exhibition featuring archive materials about women's feminism and contribution to Glasgow's history between 1980 and 1990. The second photographic exhibition curated by the Cross-party Group on Migration and inspired by the partnership Festival event titled Navigating Migration, featured work by people seeking asylum now living in Scotland and explored their mental health and wellbeing. The Festival pop-up shop run by Visitor Services

who sold books related to the panel topics and as part of the book signing programme with Festival speakers was once again very successful.

Issues and Options

Evaluation

11. While the cost-of-living crisis continues, the 2023 Festival of Politics reported a marked increase in both audience numbers and ticket sales compared to 2022 when COVID-19 and train strikes had a significant negative impact on all the Edinburgh Festivals.
12. Over the main three days of the Festival, nearly 5,000 people visited the Scottish Parliament with 1,893 attending Festival panel sessions with many more relaxing in the Festival Café Bar. These figures reflect positively when compared to the 1,100 people who attended panel sessions in 2022.
13. However, it is also worth noting the marked increase in the online audience who took advantage of the free-to-access Festival resources now uploaded to the Festival of Politics website and the Scottish Parliament's YouTube channel. This was the first year that every Festival panel event was filmed and uploaded. As of October 2023, just over 8,500 people have viewed all 26 events. This figure includes the 743 views of the BSL-interpreted Festival events which means views are up by over one-third compared with the 1,300 people who viewed the 12 Festival events uploaded to YouTube in 2022.
14. As with previous in-person Festivals a survey was conducted with attendees. However, this was the first time that surveys were issued automatically by email to attendees who had booked their Festival event via the online ticketing platform. Paper surveys were also made available in the venue for attendees to complete. Both methods resulted in a total of 273 surveys being submitted. This compares to the 422 responses to paper surveys in 2022 and 585 in 2019 despite the lower audience numbers in those years.
15. However, although fewer festivalgoers completed the survey this year, the results reflected that for almost 46% of attendees it was their first visit to the Festival, which indicates that the programme is still continuing to reach new audiences. Attendees registering their rating of the Festival event as very good or good stayed the same as 2022, with 90%.
16. The Festival of Politics survey for 2023 asked additional questions including those relating to sex, ethnicity, and long-term health or disability issues. The results reflected that almost double the number of attendees registered as female 63.7% compared to 34.9% of males. Just under

25% of attendees replied that their day-to-day activities were limited due to a health problem or disability expected to last longer than a year. On ethnicity, over 56% of attendees registered as white Scottish and 6.55% registered as a member of a mixed, multiple or other ethnic group. This compares to under 1% of people according to Scotland's census figures in 2021, identifying as mixed, multiple or other ethnicity which clearly shows that through our partnerships and programming we are engaging with audiences prioritised in the Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy (please see below).

Public Engagement Strategy

17. 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. An increase in the number of Cross-Party Groups from eight to ten this year, meant that an even broader range of audiences who were engaged in issues from aviation to Bangladesh, volunteering, health inequalities, and impacting the LGBTI+ community all attended the Festival.
18. In addition to the Cross-Party Groups, a new key partnership with the Scottish Youth Film Foundation (SYFF) proved successful and it is hoped this will continue to develop in future years. The SYFF aims to break down barriers of geography, race, disability, or socio-economic circumstances that stop young people from easily accessing the creative industries. Six young people were recruited from Skye, Lockerbie, Tain, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Glasgow from various Scottish, Ukrainian and Polish backgrounds including two Gaelic speakers. The young people were based at the Parliament for three days of training prior to the Festival before producing three 30-minute programmes broadcast live every evening over the three days of the Festival from the Parliament. The output included interviews with Festival speakers, discussion, and vox-pops with the audience. The Parliament's Broadcasting Team added value to the young people's experience with a tour of the editing facilities. The feedback from the young people on their involvement with the project was very positive and a fuller evaluation is being compiled by the SYFF to be shared with parliamentary staff in the next few months.
19. Additionally, the Festival worked with Sistema Scotland to bring almost 100 young people from the six Big Noise Communities located across Scotland to participate in the *In Conversation with Gustavo Dudamel* event on Friday 25 August. This event included a special performance by the String Ensemble from the Big Noise Raploch and a String Quartet from the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra in the Garden Lobby. The feedback from the young people who attended was overwhelmingly positive and for many it was the first time they had visited the Scottish Parliament. We hope to develop this partnership with Sistema Scotland beyond the Festival of Politics.

20. An offer to residents living near the Scottish Parliament to attend the Festival free of charge proved successful with 12 people in total (six local residents and friends) taking up the offer. We hope to build on this for future Festivals and would also hope to fully evaluate what sessions they attended and how they rated them to help us develop sessions that engage them.
21. Once again the offer of a free hot refreshment token for all attendees post-event, as previously suggested and agreed by the SPCB, also proved successful and is definitely something we would hope to continue.

BSL

22. The Events and Exhibitions Team continued to work with the Parliament's BSL Officer in advance to ensure that the events the BSL community wanted to see interpreted as part of the Festival programme were interpreted. As advised, The Festival Team ensured all BSL users were allocated complimentary tickets to ensure there were no financial barriers to accessing the Festival. A total of five events were interpreted this year. The BSL interpreted events uploaded to YouTube and the Festival site have attracted an additional 300 views to date.

Communications Activity

23. As in previous years, the Parliament Communications Office (PCO) promoted the Festival by delivering a comprehensive and integrated marketing and communications strategy. They produced a mobile-friendly website, printed programme, graphics across all our digital platforms, internal and external signage, leaflets, video content, an email campaign and paid for marketing and social content. Another key plank of the strategy was to augment the Festival's reach using the networks of our partners and we did this by providing high quality graphics for sharing across digital and social networks and contacting organisations working in the relevant fields.
24. The results of this were as follows:
 - 50 per cent of those who attended saw marketing or publicity about the Festival. Social media was where most people saw information about the Festival, closely followed by digital advertising.
 - The Festival has a very engaged network via our email subscriber list. Those engaged festivalgoers were a core part of our plan to encourage return visitors. The results of this were very encouraging. For example, our initial launch email with a small ticket offer had an open rate of 48 per cent and a click-through rate of 22 per cent which is high when measured against industry standards.
 - In total the website had 28,000 views from 6,800 users and 1,200 new users. Traffic to the website came from the following sources, in

highest order: organic social, organic search, via email, through referrals or via our paid for search.

- All of our marketing directed people onto the website, and traffic was generated from our social content, email campaign and paid for digital marketing which were key parts of the communications plan.
- Our website statistics also tell us which areas of our marketing was most effective. The top websites that directed people to the Festival of Politics website were as follows: The Scottish Parliament's own website generated the most referrals, followed by the Edinburgh International Festival's website and *The Scotsman's* website (digital advertising via *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* was a key part of our paid for marketing plan).
- Our social media campaign was also a key part of ensuring partners and others shared to their own networks information about the Festival. In total we issued 55 tweets about the Festival including content about each event, tagging and highlighting who was speaking and the content of each event. This content generated over 300 likes, almost 200,000 impressions and almost 300 re-tweets. It also had over 1,100 link clicks.

Governance

25. As previously agreed, the programme for the 2023 Festival was developed by parliamentary officials in consultation with the Clerk/Chief Executive and the Presiding Officer.

Resource Implications

26. The total budget allocated for the 2023 Festival was £60k which includes 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 on budget.

Publications Scheme

27. This paper can be published in accordance with the SPCB publication scheme.

Decision

28. The SPCB is invited to note the report.

EVENTS AND EXHIBITIONS TEAM
October 2023