

# **Festival of Politics 2022**

**24 February 2022**

**Reference: SPCB (2022) Paper 10**

## **Executive Summary**

1. This paper seeks the SPCB's views on the timing, format and development of the programme for the 2022 Festival of Politics.

## **Background**

2. Following recent discussions with the SPCB, parliamentary officials have consulted with teams across the parliament and have reviewed the timing and format for the annual Festival of Politics. The changes proposed within this paper reflect these discussions and support the Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy.
3. The overarching aim of the Festival of Politics to raise awareness of the Scottish Parliament with the people of Scotland and offer a more informal first-time engagement with the building and the institution. This is often achieved by engaging on a popular single-issue festival panel session, as borne out by previous surveys which clearly show that more than half of those attending the annual Festival are first-time attendees (56% in 2019 and 65% in 2018).

## **Issues and Options**

### **Timing**

4. As previously discussed with the SPCB and given staff resources available to develop and programme the annual Festival of Politics, it is proposed that the Festival reverts to its original timing of August to coincide with the other festivals that are happening in the city at that time. Looking at the dates of the other Edinburgh festivals we would recommend that the 2022 Festival takes place over three days from Thursday 11 to Saturday 13 August. Focussing on three days maximises the promotion and drives audiences to attend festival events.

5. Not only does this permit the Festival set-up to take place during recess but it also maximises audiences attending to view the World Press Photo exhibition in the Main Hall (Thursday 28 July to Saturday 27 August) increasing the overall number of visitors to the Parliament at that time.

**The SPCB is invited to consider this and agree that the 2022 Festival of Politics runs over three days from Thursday 11 to Saturday 13 August 2022.**

## **Format**

6. After two years of hosting the Festival online due to the pandemic, the resumption of a largely in-person Festival of Politics is proposed. This in-person format builds upon the unique selling point of the Parliament's Festival as a safe and neutral space to discuss politics in its widest and most inclusive sense. Given the feedback from both online Festivals staged in 2020 and 2021 – in particular from audience members with a disability – as well as those for whom geography, accessibility and travel-time favours an online experience – it is proposed that small number of online Festival events as appropriate to the subject matter will also be held concurrently.
7. In addition to the in-person and online sessions we would, as previously discussed, repackage all the sessions to maximise on-going engagement with them so they have built-in longevity and can be heard or viewed by multiple audiences in their own time. We replayed a number of the 2021 Festival sessions on Facebook over Christmas recess attracting new audiences and views accordingly. To give a flavour of the numbers reached, the session on COVID had nearly 400 views and almost 200 engagements and the panel on Disability and Employability had almost 200 views with over 100 reactions and comments. The 2022 Festival aims to build on this by repackaging all Festival sessions for a range of appropriate platforms including Facebook Live; YouTube; the Festival website; and podcasts that would ensure maximum reach and engagements with new audiences.
8. An in-person Festival would permit renewal of the full festival experience with the Garden Lobby once again becoming the Festival Café Bar along with a pop-up Parliament shop. The Festival Café Bar provides a space for free events and activities and the opportunity for festivalgoers to meet with each other, Members and panellists to discuss the issues generated both pre- and post-event over food and refreshments.
9. As discussed with the SPCB the 2022 Festival will see an overall reduction in the number of panel sessions. However, by careful programming; development of key partners; and an engaging free Festival Café Bar programme the aim is to retain previous audience levels and engagement.

**The SPCB is asked to consider this and to agree the proposed changes to the 2022 Festival programme.**

## Partnerships

10. As with the two previous festivals we are proposing we continue our overarching partnership with Scotland's Futures Forum. The partnership continues to benefit both partners providing opportunities for shared promotion and development of panels.
11. Although we will be reducing the overall number of panel sessions over the three days, we recommend that we continue to build upon and develop key partnerships both internally and externally. Following the SPCB's approval for the 2022 Festival, parliamentary officials would make contact with previous partners to start a dialogue on developing relevant and engaging panel sessions. We would also recommend that we seek suggestions from committees and Cross-Party Groups on possible panel sessions.
12. The aim of this approach is to fulfil the Public Engagement Strategy by developing partnerships and reducing and removing barriers that will engage a more diverse mix of audiences.

**The SPCB is asked to consider this and to agree this approach to developing partnerships for the Festival of Politics.**

## Ticketing

13. Although there is a slight increase in fees incurred by our online ticket supplier, we are not planning to increase the ticket prices at this time. Therefore, ticket prices for concession and full price for panel sessions will remain at £4.00 and £6.00 respectively and for Debating Chamber events at £6.00 and £8.00 respectively. The overall impact on budgets is likely to be minimum but we will keep this under review.

## Communications

14. Previously our marketing campaigns have been centred around engaging peoples' interest in debating the big issues of the day within a balanced and safe environment being informed by experts but allowing participants to make up their own mind.
15. We would plan to build on that important element this year and emphasise the in-person element since the Festival has been online for the past two years. We know that with the right programme, the Festival does attract people that have never engaged with the Parliament before, alongside our core audience of those with an interest in current affairs. The partnership element proposed would also allow us to connect with new audiences via existing networks which has been a challenge in the past.
16. We also recognise that our panel sessions and content will be of wider interest to those that follow and engage with us on our digital channels. As previously mentioned, last year our Festival content was repackaged for several of our

digital platforms including used as podcasts, on Facebook and on YouTube. Last year they ran immediately after the Festival and also over the Christmas recess. This approach gives the Festival much greater reach and allows us to engage people in the topics of debate without having to be physically present.

## **Governance**

17. The development of the 2022 Festival programme will follow the same governance model as previous years through discussions with the Presiding Officer and the Clerk/Chief Executive.

## **Publication Scheme**

18. This Paper should not be published until the 2022 Festival of Politics programme has been announced.

## **Next Steps**

19. Following approval by the SPCB parliamentary officials will issue communications to Members, committees and Cross-Party Groups informing them of the Festival dates and seeking suggestions for festival panels. Parliamentary officials will also make contact with key partners to start developing the 2022 programme. Wider communications announcing the Festival dates and programme will take place later in the year.

## **Decision**

20. The SPCB is asked to agree:
  - the 2022 Festival of Politics takes place over three days from Thursday 11 to Saturday 13 August 2022;
  - the format of the 2022 Festival of Politics will be largely in-person with a small number of online events; and
  - that key partnerships be developed to increase the diversity of audiences attending the three-day Festival.

**Events and Exhibitions Team**  
February 2022