

Festival of Politics 2024

7 December 2023

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 72

Executive Summary

1. This paper seeks the SPCB's views on the timing, format, a new ticket pricing structure and development of the programme for the 2024 Festival of Politics.

Background

2. The 2024 Festival of Politics will continue to build on the SPCB's Public Engagement Strategy aim of breaking down barriers and engaging with new audiences.
3. As with previous Festivals, the overarching partnership will continue to be with the parliament's think-tank Scotland's Futures Forum. Officials will also continue to progress partnerships both internally and with external partners including Scottish universities, other Edinburgh Festivals and the Scottish Youth Film Foundation. The Festival will continue to seek suggestions from a selection of Cross-Party Groups and committees on programming balanced panel events with a popular public appeal, with a preference given to those who have not taken part to date.
4. Following discussions with the Festival partners and having consulted with internal parliamentary teams, including the Education and Outreach Team and Visitor Services, parliamentary officials have reviewed the timing and format of this year's Festival of Politics. The changes proposed within this paper reflect these discussions and support the Public Engagement Strategy.
5. As in previous years there will be no one overarching theme as the Festival continues to respond to contemporary political issues and social affairs as well as programming well-known *In Conversation with ...*

speakers who attract a large audience. However, the Festival will mark the 25th anniversary of the Scottish Parliament in a strand of programming that looks at the past 25 years whilst considering what the next 25 years will look like.

Issues and Options

Timing

6. As previously discussed with the SPCB and given staff resources during summer recess, we would recommend that the 2024 Festival of Politics continues to take place in August but that it should take place the week beginning Monday 19 August.
7. It is proposed that by running the Festival mid-week as it did in 2023, this minimises running costs usually incurred by weekend working. The proposal to hold the Festival later in the month of August provides an opportunity to increase engagement with schools who will resume in Lothian and West Lothian the week prior and to maximise partnership working with other Edinburgh festivals that run later in the month.

The SPCB is invited to consider this and agree that the 2024 Festival of Politics takes place the week beginning 19 August 2024.

Format

8. Responding to feedback from attendees over successive Festivals, that there should be more of a balance between the live music Café Bar programme and a quiet space for post-panel or *In Conversation with ...* discussion, it is proposed that the Festival Café Bar programme be re-formatted to ensure a quieter discussion space takes prominence rather than live performances running throughout the whole day. While one or two live performances will still take place each day in the Café Bar these will be very closely aligned to a particular panel discussion or *In Conversation with ...* event.

Ticketing

9. The Festival has not increased its ticket prices since 2015. And whilst we have kept ticket prices at the 2015 level, this has become progressively more challenging each year with increases in staff and AV costs. To ensure that we can bring the Festival in on budget we require to increase tickets slightly to cover these additional costs. We recommend a £1.00 increase to ticket prices for all panel events so what was formerly a £4.00 concession ticket would become £5.00; and what was £6.00 would become £7.00. And for Chamber events, as they have additional broadcasting costs we recommend an increase of £2.00.

Tickets currently retail at £6.00/£8.00 and the proposed increase would take new prices to £8.00/£10.00.

10. Even with factoring in the proposed ticket increases, our ticketing price structure is below the average comparable event ticket price of between £10.00 and £16.00. Online Festival events would remain free-to-view and the allocation of complimentary tickets to audiences identified as key to the Public Engagement Strategy would continue to expand accordingly.
11. The SPCB suggestion in 2022 to offer a free tea, coffee or water refreshment as part of the ticket-price remains popular with festivalgoers and it is proposed as continuing in 2024.

The SPCB is invited to consider this and agree that for 2024 we increase ticket prices as set out above.

Partnerships

12. As in previous years, the Festival's main partner will continue to be Scotland's Futures Forum. The partnership benefits both partners providing opportunities for shared promotion and development of panels. The Forum's input is of particular importance as a strand of the 2024 Festival programme will explore the next 25 years of the Scottish Parliament in relation to key devolved topics and will also examine the future influence of Artificial Intelligence on all aspects of our lives.
13. The Participation and Communities Team (PACT) is developing a Young Women's Empowerment project in partnership with the Young Women's Movement and the Scottish Youth Parliament. This builds on a previous partnership programme delivered with both organisations. The aim of this work is to better reflect and represent young women and their views in the work of Parliament. As part of this, it is proposed that the 2024 Festival includes a young women's take over day. This would involve the Events and Exhibitions Team and PACT working with the Young Women's Movement and Scottish Youth Parliament to co-design six or seven panels led by young women on issues they feel are important to them but open to all.
14. A partnership with a new nationwide campaign, Healing Arts Scotland is also proposed. The week of celebratory performances, exhibitions, workshop, public art, dialogues and policy proposals is the result of a partnership spearheaded by Scottish Ballet and the Jameel Arts and Health Lab and in collaboration with the World Health Organisation that will launch as part of the Edinburgh International Festival 2024 on Monday 19 August 2024.
15. The aim of Healing Arts Scotland is to celebrate and advocate for improved physical, mental and social health through the arts. Previous Healing Arts events have taken place in cities from London and New York

to Jaipur and Riyadh, but this is the first time a nationwide campaign has been announced with events planned for Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Orkney. Among the many partners already confirmed as taking part are: Sistema Scotland, Scottish Opera, Luminate, Intercultural Youth Scotland, The University of Edinburgh, and Healthcare Improvement Scotland – many of whom the Festival has also worked with. This network of arts and health organisations aim to address Scotland's health concerns, focussing on four priority areas where the arts can have a measurable impact: loneliness and isolation; mental health and young people; dementia; and mental health in prisons. It is proposed that the Festival and Healing Arts Scotland partner on a number of panel discussions inspired by these relevant topics.

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

Governance

16. The development of the 2024 Festival programme will follow the same governance model as previous years through discussions with the Presiding Officer and the Clerk/Chief Executive.

Resources

17. If the proposed ticket structure is agreed by the SPCB, a budget of £60k will be required for the 2024 Festival of Politics. This is the same net cost as 2023. Should the ticket structure not be agreed, a further £3k-£4k would be required. This budget is required to cover the travel and accommodation costs of all participants; the external audio-visual costs, the costs of broadcasting; staffing; and the Festival Café Bar programme.

Publication Scheme

18. This paper should not be published until the 2024 Festival of Politics programme has been announced.

Next Steps

19. Following approval by the SPCB, officials will issue communications to Members, committees and Cross-Party Groups informing them of Festival dates and seeking suggestions for festival panels with popular general appeal. Officials will also continue developing key partnerships for the 2024 programme. Wider communications announcing the Festival dates and programme will take place in June 2024.

Decision

20. The SPCB is asked to consider this paper and agree:
- that the Festival of Politics takes place during the week beginning 19 August 2024;
 - the new ticketing structure for 2024 as set out above in the paper; and
 - the approach to developing partnerships for the Festival of Politics.

EVENTS AND EXHIBITIONS TEAM
October 2023