



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Festival of Politics 2023

19 January 2023

Reference: SPCB (2023) Paper 6

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this Paper is to seek the SPCB's view on the planning and preparations for the 2023 Festival of Politics, in particular the timing, format and development of the programme for the 2023 Festival of Politics.

Issues and Options

Timing

2. As previously discussed and agreed with the SPCB and given staff resources during summer recess, we would recommend that the 2023 Festival of Politics once again takes place during summer recess over three mid-week days, between Wednesday 9 and Friday 11 August 2023.
3. It is proposed that by running the Festival event mid-week and not over a Saturday this still affords a focussed three-day promotion of the Festival; but minimises the Festival running costs usually incurred by weekend working. The mid-week dates also permit Members, their staff and SPS who may be working on campus to attend at their convenience during the working day.

The SPCB is asked to consider this and agree that the 2023 Festival of Politics runs over three days from Wednesday 9 to Friday 11 August 2023.

Format

4. With the resumption of the 2022 Festival as a largely in-person Festival, plus three online events, and the strong viewing/audio figures generated by this selection of filmed and uploaded events to the Parliament's You Tube channel and podcast output, there is a clear audience wish – expressed by many respondents in the survey feedback on the 2022 Festival – for consumption of Festival content at a time of their choosing.

5. In an effort to deliver and support the Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy's aim of breaking down barriers and diversifying the Festival audience, there is additional reasoning for live broadcasting of a selection of Festival events. This would appeal to audiences for whom geographical, economic and accessibility barriers stop them from attending the Festival events in-person. This live broadcasting format would also enable the BSL community to enjoy recorded filmed events in their own time.
6. After consulting with Broadcasting colleagues, it is proposed that a selection of events are presented as hybrid webinars. This approach would allow committee rooms that are already set-up to enable hybrid committee meetings, to be used in the same way for Festival events. This would make more efficient use of staff resources as an in-person event could simultaneously be broadcast via Zoom by the same staff team.
7. The hybrid option would still attract the Festival audiences who enjoy attending events in-person and the overall visitor experience of being in the Scottish Parliament building. It is therefore proposed that the Garden Lobby continues to be transformed into the Festival Café Bar hub along with the Parliament's pop-up shop as in previous years. The Festival Café Bar provides a safe and neutral space for festivalgoers, Members and panellists to discuss the issues raised by panel events; and enjoy the free programme of visual exhibitions and live-acoustic music.
8. We would propose programming the same number of events as in 2022, with around 23 events taking place, many of which would be made available as hybrid webinars via the Zoom platform and recorded for future promotion on the website or on partner's social media platforms sites.
9. As in previous years there is no overall theme, however the 2023 Festival programme will respond to a number of contemporary political issues and social affairs as well as programming well-known In Conversation speakers who can attract a large audience.

Partnerships

10. We propose continuing the overarching partnership with Scotland's Futures Forum. The partnership benefits both partners providing opportunities for shared promotion and development of panels.
11. In addition, we recommend continuing to build upon and develop key partnerships both internally and externally. We would like to build on the link PACT made with the Grassmarket Recovery Open Book group and invite them back to attend as supported by PACT colleagues. We would also propose issuing an open call to committees and Cross-Party Groups and work with a small number - prioritising those that didn't take part last year – and take forward a selection of balanced panel events inspired by their single-issue interest with broad public interest.

12. The Festival Team have also been in contact with Scottish Youth Film Foundation (SYFF) with a view to involving a group of young people from across Scotland who face barriers to easily access the creative industries. The SYFF aim to break down barriers created by geography, race, disability and socio-economic circumstances. The aim is for SYFF to train the young people in advance of them being based at the Parliament for the duration of the Festival where they would broadcast a programme of pre-recorded and in-studio live interviews.
13. This broad approach builds on existing and develops new partnerships that assists us in delivering and achieving the Public Engagement Strategy by 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

14. Considering the cost-of-living crisis we would propose that ticket prices remain at 2019 levels and the 2022 SPCB suggestion of free tea, coffee or water refreshment as part of the ticket-price also remains. 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.
15. In addition, with the aims of delivering the Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy, it is recommended that a percentage of complimentary tickets are distributed via partner organisations; the Parliament's BSL Officer and PACT to audience members who may not have previously attended the Festival and for whom economic barriers hinder their participation. This method was successfully used in 2022 in relation to several Cross-Party Group events and the panel on care experienced people via our partner Who Cares? Scotland.

Communications activities

16. As in previous years an integrated communications strategy will be developed to support the Festival. This will make use of traditional media, marketing and our web and digital channels to promote engagement with events and to drive ticket sales. As well as engaging with our core Festival audience, our strategy will also look at how we can attract a new, wider audience and specifically those within our Public Engagement Strategy. As previously we will also work closely with partners in promoting events to reach those interested in the issues in an efficient and cost effective way. Finally, building on the experience of 2022, we will include a post Festival communications strand to drive traffic to the recordings of the sessions and continue engagement beyond the events themselves.

Governance

17. The development of the 2023 Festival programme will follow the same governance model as previous years through discussions with the Presiding Officer and the Clerk/Chief Executive.

Resource Implications

18. The overall budget for the 2023 Festival is set at £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.

Publication Scheme

19. This Paper should not be published until the 2023 Festival of Politics programme has been announced.

Next Steps

20. Following approval by the SPCB, parliamentary officials will issue communications to Members, committees and Cross-party Groups informing them of Festival dates and seeking suggestions for festival panels. Parliamentary officials will also contact key partners to start developing the 2023 programme. Wider communications announcing the Festival dates and programme will take place later in 2023.

Decision

21. The SPCB is asked to consider this Paper and agree:
 - That the 2023 Festival of Politics takes place over three days from Wednesday 9 to Friday 11 August 2023; and
 - our approach to developing partnerships for the 2023 Festival of Politics (as set out in paragraphs 10-13).

Events and Exhibitions Team
January 2023