



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body
Thursday 11 December 2025 (Session 6)

Festival of Politics 2025 Report

Executive summary

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the SPCB with a summary of the 2025 Festival of Politics.

Background

2. As agreed by the SPCB, the 2025 Festival of Politics took place in-person with the majority of events filmed and later uploaded to the Scottish Parliament's YouTube channel and Scottish Parliament TV (SPTV) as well as the Festival of Politics website. Held over three days between Wednesday 20 and Friday 22 August, there were 32 events in total.
3. The Festival programme reflected a varied programme that reflected contemporary political, ethical and social issues, including international relations, climate crisis, transport for disabled people, misogyny, oligarchs, fact-free information, social care, and the big issues facing Holyrood in 2026.
4. The Festival brought together 19 Members including the Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, as well as David McGill, Clerk/Chief Executive chairing one or more of the 32 panel discussions and *In Conversation with ...* events, academics, activists, former politicians, musicians, journalists and experts in various fields.
5. As with previous years, the Festival worked in partnership with a record number of ten Cross-Party Groups, all of whom responded to the Festival's open call to participate in the programme.
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 Members Maggie Chapman MSP and Brian Whittle MSP chairing two events. The Futures Forum also partnered with the Festival on the *In Conversation with Professor Danny Dorling*.
7. The Festival also partnered with a record 18 organisations according to their associated subject or academic speaker's specialism in relation to the panel

Reference: SPCB (2025) - Paper 75 – by correspondence

discussion topic. They included BBC Scotland; the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights; COSLA; the David Hume Institute; the John Smith Centre; The National Robotarium; The Royal Scottish Geographical Society; Scottish Care; The Scottish Council on Global Affairs; The Scottish Information Commissioner; Scottish Youth Film Foundation (SYFF); the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews; Stirling, Strathclyde; and West of Scotland.

8. This marked the third year of a partnership with the SYFF that continues to build engagement not only with a diverse range of young people from across Scotland taking part in the Festival project but significantly the organisation's links to over 80 high school pupils from three different West Lothian schools who attended as Festival audience members at events running throughout Thursday 21 August.
9. The Festival Café Bar also hosted a programme of dance, live choirs, book signings and a ukelele orchestra. This included a Bollywood dance performance, dancers from the Chinese Arts Association, Choir 21, the Makaton signing and signing group of young people from Downs Syndrome Scotland; and a performance by the climate choir Earth in Common. The three visual exhibitions included The National Robotarium and their interactive robot; a photographic exhibition curated by The Poverty Alliance and Fair by Design titled *Give Me Some Credit!* that highlighted the impact on families when affordable credit is denied. Robert Gordon University also presented their 3D digital representation featuring the architecture of the Scottish Parliament and Debating Chamber. The organisation Folkemødet who are looking to establish a democracy festival in Scotland, also had a presence in the Festival Café Bar.
10. The Festival Climate Café returned for a second year after last year's led to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament Climate Café. This year's information event was led by SPCB staff and representatives from the Climate Café and attracted both the Festival audience and high school pupils.

Issues and Options

Evaluation

11. The three days of the Festival saw over 3,400 people visit the Scottish Parliament with over 2,200 tickets sold for those attending Festival of Politics sessions and many more who enjoyed the free entertainment in the Festival Café Bar.
12. It is also worth noting that as with the online audience in 2024, many more people took advantage of the free-to-access Festival resources uploaded to the Scottish Parliament's YouTube channel (2826 views), and sptv (862 views) and the Festival of Politics website. This figure includes the 984 views of the eight BSL interpreted events.

Reference: SPCB (2025) - Paper 75 – by correspondence

13. As with previous Festivals a survey was conducted with attendees. This was the third year that surveys were issued electronically to attendees who had booked tickets via the online ticketing platform and resulted in 43 replies. A sample number of paper surveys were also made available in the venue for attendees to complete. Both methods resulted in a total of 157 surveys being submitted.
14. Although fewer festivalgoers completed the online and print surveys this year, the results indicated that 51% were attending the Festival for the first time indicating that the Festival is continuing to engage and grow new audiences. Attendees registering their rating of the Festival event as very good or good was 92%, similar to last year (93%).

Public Engagement Strategy

15. The Festival continues to support 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 and in the case of the Scottish Youth Film Foundation, a series of nightly streamed television programmes. The number of partners this year was 21 including those organisations linked to the exhibitions in the Festival Café Bar. The ten partnerships with Cross-Party Groups meant that the Festival continued to extend its overall audience reach.
16. The ongoing partnership with the SYFF also aims to break down barriers of geography, race, disability or socio-economic circumstances that stop young people from accessing employment in the creative industries. Six young people were recruited from across Scotland from various backgrounds. The young people were based at the Parliament for three days and produced three live daily television programmes and two extra programmes of interviews, discussion and vox-pops with Festival speakers and audience members.
17. For a third year, the partnership with SYFF continued to ensure three high schools from West Lothian and East Lothian attended with five teachers and over 86 pupils, many of whom were studying Modern Studies at Higher level. The schools all attended events on Thursday 21 August including all 86 pupils who took part in the *In Conversation with Professor Danny Dorling*. Pupils also took an active role as part of the audience Q&A in *The Rise of Misogyny* panel; *Smartphone-free childhood*, and the *Gen Z and politics* panel. A few pupils stayed later to attend the *In Conversation with Masha* from Pussy Riot.

BSL

18. The Events and Exhibitions Team continue to work with the Parliament's BSL Officer in advance to ensure that the events the BSL community were most likely to see interpreted as part of the Festival programme were actioned. As advised the Festival Team ensured all BSL users were allocated complementary tickets to ensure there were no financial barriers to accessing the Festival. A total of eight events were interpreted, three each day. The BSL

interpreted events uploaded to YouTube and the Festival site via SPTV have attracted an additional 984 views as of December 2025.

Communications Activity

19. As in previous years, the Parliament Communications Office (PCO) promoted the Festival by delivering a comprehensive and integrated marketing and communications strategy. The outputs included 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 a toolkit of high-quality graphics for sharing across digital and social networks and contacting organisations working in the relevant fields.
20. The results of this were as follows:
 - 89% of those who attended saw marketing or publicity about the Festival, which was an increase from last year (58%). Social media and on the Parliament's website was where most people found information about the Festival.
 - Festival has a very engaged network via our email subscriber list which has over 3,200 subscribers. 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 27% and a click-through rate of 15% which is high when measured against industry standards.
 - In total 11,393 users visited the site, compared to 9,182 last year – an increase of 24%. Traffic to the website came from the following sources, in highest order: organic search, direct (including email), organic social, referral and paid.
 - 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.
 - The website statistics also tell us which areas of our marketing was most effective. The top websites that directed people to the Festival website were as follows: Google search, direct traffic (including newsletters), the Parliament's website, Facebook, Bing and LinkedIn.
21. The social media campaign was also a key part of ensuring partners and others shared information about the Festival to their own networks. PCO used LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and X to engage audiences with Festival content. On Instagram our content had total views of almost 82,000; on Facebook our content reached over 33,000 people; on LinkedIn we got over 36,000 views; and on X it was over 62,000 views.

Governance

22. As previously agreed, the programme for the 2025 Festival was developed by parliamentary officials in consultation with the Clerk/Chief Executive and the Presiding Officer.

Resource implications

23. The total budget allocated for the 2025 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 for a three-day Festival. The Festival was brought in on budget through very tight management of resources and a balanced travel and accommodation speaker costs.

Publication Scheme

24. This paper can be published in line with the SPCB publication scheme.

Decision

25. The SPCB is invited to note the paper.

Events and Exhibitions Team
December 2025