



FESTIVAL OF POLITICS

AN FHÈIS PHOILITIGS

BOOK YOUR TICKETS NOW AT [FESTIVALOFPOLITICS.SCOT](https://www.festivalofpolitics.scot)



27 – 28
August 2026



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PRESIDING OFFICER'S WELCOME



I am delighted to introduce the programme for the 2026 Festival of Politics.

We present a lively and varied programme on the issues that matter to the people of Scotland, whether that is housing, stopping child poverty, or the impact of Brexit ten years on, the Festival of Politics provides a safe platform to actively discuss and learn about these issues in order that everyone leaves the Festival feeling better informed and that their voice was heard as part of a civilised debate.

From international conflict to free speech, the power of sport and culture in diplomacy, and young people's trust in politics; we have

an incredible line-up of academics and experts in the field ready to give their knowledgeable perspective and invite your participation in all these events.

And alongside the free panel events on offer, we have a lively free programme of entertainment in the Festival Café Bar. We look forward to welcoming you all at your Scottish Parliament.

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Presiding Officer

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FÀILTE BHON OIFIGEAR RIAGHLAIDH

Tha mi air mo dhòigh prògram Fèis Phoilitigs 2026 a thaisbeanadh dhuibh.

Tha sinn a' toirt thugaibh prògram beòthail agus eadar-mheasgte air na cùisean a tha cudromach do mhuintir na h-Alba. Eadar taigheadas, stad a chur air bochdainn chloinne, no buaidh Brexit deich bliadhna às a dhèidh, tha an Fhèis Phoilitigs a' toirt seachad àrd-ùrlar sàbhailte gus na cùisean sin a dheasbad gu gnìomhach agus gus ionnsachadh mun deidhinn, gus am fàg a h-uile duine an Fhèis a' faireachdainn nas fheàrr fiosraichte agus gun deach an guth a chluinntinn mar phàirt de dheasbad sìobhalta.

Bho chòmhstri eadar-nàiseanta gu saorsa cainnte, cumhachd spòrs agus cultair ann an dioplòmasaidh agus earbsa dhaoine òga ann am poilitigs; tha sàr bhuidheann de

luchd-acadaimigeach agus eòlaichean san raon deiseil airson an sealladh fiosrachail acasan a thoirt thugainn, agus tha sinn a' toirt fiathachadh dhuibh pàirt a ghabhail sna tachartasan sin uile.

Agus còmhla ris na tachartasan pannail an-asgaidh a bhios rim faotainn, bidh prògram beòthail an-asgaidh de dhibhearsan againn cuideachd ann am Bàr Cafaidh na Fèise. Tha sinn a' coimhead air adhart ri fàilte a chur oirbh uile aig ur Pàrlamaid.

Kenneth Gibson BPA
Oifigear Riaghlaidh







SEE THE FULL LINE-UP AT [FESTIVALOFPOLITICS.SCOT](https://www.festivalofpolitics.scot)



WHAT'S ON

THURSDAY 27 AUGUST

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| The collapse of reading | 9:30am – 10:45am |
| Brexit – ten years on | 9:45am – 11:00am |
| Human trafficking in Scotland | 11:15am – 12:30pm |
| The future of Scottish colleges and universities | 11:30am – 12:45pm |
| Why we need to talk AI | 1:00pm – 2:15pm |
| Young people and trust in politics FREE BSL  | 1:15pm – 2:30pm |
| Why social media abuse towards women in politics is damaging democracy | 2:45pm – 4:00pm |
| Trust in public institutions BSL  | 3:00pm – 4:15pm |
| Does AI help or hinder the climate crisis? | 4:30pm – 5:45pm |
| Challenging the manosphere BSL  | 4:45pm – 6:00pm |
| Can we take politics out of museums? | 6:15pm – 7:30pm |
| Stopping child poverty FREE | 6:30pm – 7:45pm |
| In Conversation with Brenda Hale, the Rt Hon Baroness Hale of Richmond DBE BSL  | 6:30pm – 8:00pm |

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FRIDAY 28 AUGUST

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| After Holyrood: has Scottish architecture lost its verve? | 9:30am – 10:45am |
| The soft power of culture and sport | 9:45am – 11:00am |
| Choppy waters ahead for Scotland's water? | 11:15am – 12:30pm |
| America v China – clash of the superpowers? BSL  | 11:30am – 12:45pm |
| A Scotland of more homes: growing prosperity and shrinking poverty | 1:00pm – 2:15pm |
| Civil disobedience – from rent strikes to Kenmure Street BSL  | 1:15pm – 2:30pm |
| Scotland's economy – why can't we own more? | 2:45pm – 4:00pm |
| When does free speech become hate speech? | 3:00pm – 4:15pm |
| Scotland's Disability Summit – what next? FREE BSL  | 4:30pm – 5:45pm |
| The evolution of devolution | 4:45pm – 6:00pm |
| Are we at war? | 6:30pm – 7:45pm |

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THURSDAY

27 AUGUST 2026

The collapse of reading

In partnership with
Scottish Book Trust

9:30am – 10:45am / £7.50, £5.00

According to data, global IQ scores started dropping in the 21st century, with experts pointing the finger at a similar drop in reading levels and a shift towards skim-reading on screens. What are the implications of a less literate public, and does it make them more vulnerable to misinformation and affect meaningful democratic participation?

Brexit – ten years on

In partnership with The Centre for
Public Policy, University of Glasgow

9:45am – 11:00am / £7.50, £5.00

The vote to leave the European Union marked a rupture in politics. A decade on, where does the UK, and Scotland, stand in its relationship with the European Union? What are the risks and opportunities in terms of politics, policy, the economy and security?

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Human trafficking in Scotland

11:15am – 12:30pm / £7.50, £5.00

The Epstein Files focussed attention on one of the most pervasive human rights abuses, human trafficking. Figures show that almost 80% of women and children trafficked in Scotland suffered sexual exploitation. What is Scotland doing to address this global issue?



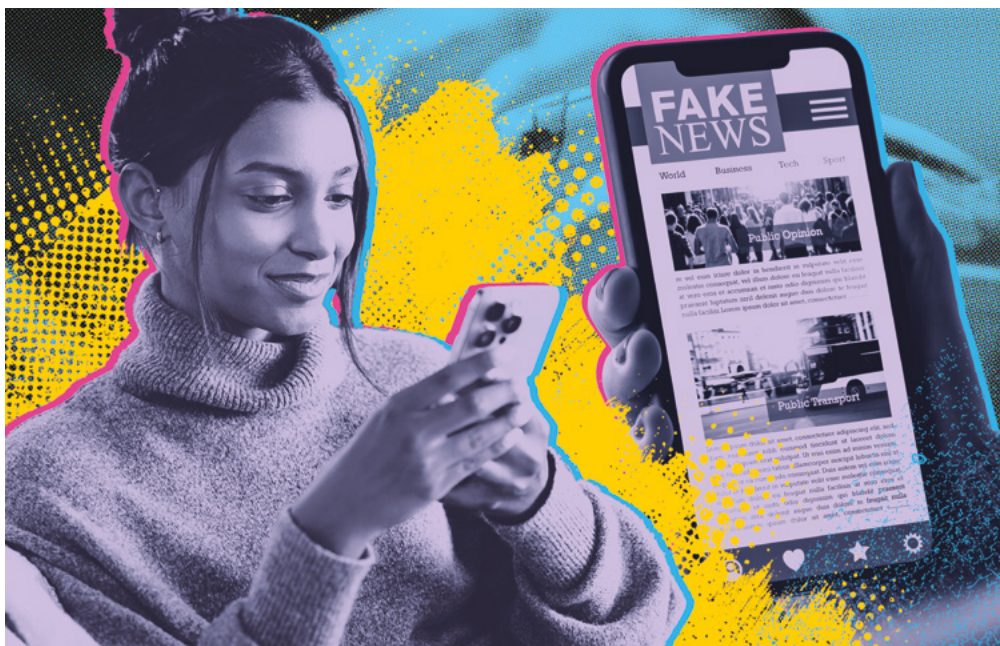
The future of Scottish colleges and universities

In partnership with Universities Scotland
and Colleges Scotland

11:30am – 12:45pm / £7.50, £5.00

Scottish college and university education is in peril. Both colleges and universities flag underfunding, rising costs and unprecedented levels of change. Add in volatility in international student markets, uncertain skills requirements and difficult conversations about the meaning of tertiary education and the question arises: what's the plan to future proof Scottish college and university education?

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Why we need to talk AI

In partnership with The National Robotarium

1:00pm – 2:15pm / £7.50, £5.00

Chatbots like ChatGPT are transforming society, politics and business, and it's one of the biggest and fastest technological changes in history. How do we learn how to talk – and not talk to – AI in a way that makes the most of technology rather than succumbing to manipulation?

Young people and trust in politics

In partnership with The Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot and The Scottish Youth Film Foundation

1:15pm – 2:30pm / **FREE**

What do politics mean to young people today? Where are they accessing information and how is a distrust of information shaping their understanding of key issues, influencing their choices, and affecting their full participation in local and national democracy?



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Why social media abuse towards women in politics is damaging democracy

In partnership with The Jo Cox Foundation

2:45pm – 4:00pm / £7.50, £5.00

Gendered disinformation, smear campaigns against women parliamentarians, and questioning of female politicians' fitness to lead, are among the challenges society must address. So, what are we doing to protect women candidates, counter gendered disinformation and ensure women are not deterred from standing in the first place?



Trust in public institutions

3:00pm – 4:15pm / £7.50, £5.00

The Post Office scandal caused such a public outcry that its impact is still felt today. How can we avoid the repetition of similar scandals and build in accountability, oversight, transparency and some humanity to institutions that will build, not destroy, trust in public institutions?

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Does AI help or hinder the climate crisis?

4:30pm – 5:45pm / £7.50, £5.00

While artificial intelligence promises to tackle the climate crisis, the paradox exists in how to build a future in which AI benefits society without simultaneously causing irreparable environmental damage through high-energy, high-water and land-intensive data centres. Who is legislating to balance the AI benefits with the environmental impact and how?

Challenging the manosphere

In partnership with White Ribbon Scotland

4:45pm – 6:00pm / £7.50, £5.00

The manosphere is an informal network where everyone from online influencers to men's rights activists promote deeply misogynistic content. It now influences everything from respect in relationships to gender-based violence and men's own mental health crisis. What are we doing to tackle what has been described as a 'national emergency'?



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Can we take politics out of museums?

In partnership with The University of Aberdeen

6:15pm – 7:30pm / £7.50, £5.00

Museums have been viewed as the trusted custodians of collective memories and shared heritage. However, by choosing the stories they tell, the sponsorship they accept, and whether they should repatriate from collections, museums are making political decisions. Should they try to be impartial, or become places of activism?



Stopping child poverty

In partnership with The Joseph Rowntree Foundation

6:30pm – 7:45pm / **FREE**

With estimates that one in four Scottish children remains locked in poverty, how do we break the cycle and make meaningful change to the poverty that corrosively impacts hunger, health, work, debt, insecure housing, and energy poverty? Are policies and interventions too piecemeal and fragmented to make substantive structural change?

Join the Climate Café®

Welcome to this pop-up, a safe space to chat and act on climate change. No need to be a climate expert as all perspectives are welcome in a very inclusive space. Free refreshments and biscuits.

All day / **FREE**

See festivalofpolitics.scot for more information.

CLIMATECAFÉ

SEE THE FULL LINE-UP AT [FESTIVALOFPOLITICS.SCOT](https://festivalofpolitics.scot)



In Conversation with Brenda Hale, the Rt Hon Baroness Hale of Richmond DBE

In partnership with The Law Society of Scotland

6:30pm – 8:00pm / £10.00, £8.00

Join the **Presiding Officer** and **Brenda Hale** as she discusses her incredible legal career as a pioneering reformer. With her inspirational motto that 'women are equal to everything', Lady Hale was the first woman Law Commissioner, the first and youngest female Law Lord and the first woman appointed as President of the Supreme Court.

While her landmark rulings in areas of domestic violence, divorce, mental health and equality blazed a trail, it was her ruling on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's 'unlawful' suspension of Parliament (whilst wearing a spider brooch) that catapulted her into wider public consciousness.

Join the discussion on her book, *With the Law on Our Side*, as she reveals how the law works in real time with true stories of real cases and people, and why justice really does matter.

There will be a book signing after this event in the Festival Café Bar.

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After Holyrood: has Scottish architecture lost its verve?

In partnership with The Royal Incorporation of Architects Scotland

9:30am – 10:45am / £7.50, £5.00

The Scottish Parliament building opened in 2004 to acclaim and controversy, shaped by cost pressures and political scrutiny. Twenty-two years on, has it supported long-term public value, or encouraged greater caution in how ambition, risk and design are managed?

The soft power of culture and sport

In partnership with Edinburgh International Festival

9:45am – 11:00am / £7.50, £5.00

In a world dominated by headlines of conflict and division, cultural and sporting diplomacy can play a powerful role in fostering mutual understanding between nations. How do these events work to avoid the politics of sponsorship and commercialisation and forge longstanding and valuable connections where formal diplomacy might falter?

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Choppy waters ahead for Scotland's water?

In partnership with The University of Dundee

11:15am – 12:30pm / £7.50, £5.00

The television drama *A Dirty Business* focussed on the failings of English water companies and, while Scottish Water is publicly owned, it still faces major challenges. From climate change to ageing infrastructure, water scarcity and pollutants, what's the plan for Scotland's water resources, services and infrastructure?



BSL 

America v China – clash of the superpowers?

In partnership with The Foreign Policy Centre

11:30am – 12:45pm / £7.50, £5.00

President Trump's promotion of an America First doctrine has introduced a new world order. China is also expanding its global domination as a top trading partner in Africa and South America. Both superpowers came to trade war blows but how will they navigate geopolitical tensions and what are the implications for the rest of the world?

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A Scotland of more homes: growing prosperity and shrinking poverty

In partnership with The David Hume Institute and The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations

1:00pm – 2:15pm / £7.50, £5.00

Scotland is in the grip of a housing polycrisis: rates of home ownership have fallen, private sector rents continue to rise, and rates of homelessness and households living in temporary accommodation have reached record highs. Where are the bold policy reforms and urgent shift in recognising that housing is critical economic infrastructure shaping jobs, wealth, climate progress, and wellbeing?

Civil disobedience – from rent strikes to Kenmure Street

1:15pm – 2:30pm / £7.50, £5.00

From rent strikes to poll tax and from The Glasgow Girls to Kenmure Street, civil disobedience in Scotland has long been a method of achieving social change. Join the panel to discuss why and how Scotland's civil disobedience is generating cultural expression with popular appeal from plays to films.

BSL 

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Scotland's economy – why can't we own more?

In partnership with Social Enterprise Scotland

2:45pm – 4:00pm / £7.50, £5.00

With a new Community Wealth Building Act, and its goals of placing more control in the hands of local communities and redirecting wealth back into those same neighbourhoods, how could new economic models uplift communities as well as individuals?

When does free speech become hate speech?

In partnership with The John Smith Centre

3:00pm – 4:15pm / £7.50, £5.00

The right to express one's views without fear or unlawful interference in an open and fair society, even if some find those views offensive, is a cornerstone of our democratic system. But when does free speech become hate speech and how does social media help or hinder free speech?

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Scotland's Disability Summit – what next?

In partnership with Disability Equality Scotland

4:30pm – 5:45pm / **FREE**

The Scottish Parliament and the Cross-Party Group on Disability held the second summit for disabled people from across Scotland earlier this year. The top issues identified by people attending related to transport, social care, inclusive education, voting and elections, and social security. From improving transport providers communications on accessibility to support for unpaid carers and fully accessible polling stations and improved staff training right across society, join the discussion on what any new Cross-Party Group on Disability should raise with this new Session of the Scottish Parliament.

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The evolution of devolution

4:45pm – 6:00pm / £7.50, £5.00

With the devolved nationalist governments of Wales and Scotland having been elected this May, it is timely to look at the progress of devolution over the decades. How successful has it been across the four nations and have hopes and aspirations been realised? What of the challenges ahead for the UK government's relationships with all the devolved governments? And what about the opportunities for a 'devolution revolution' in England, with plans to establish new mayoral authorities and elect mayors in a growing number of regions? Will the devolution evolution continue to grow?



Are we at war?

In partnership with The Scottish Council on Global Affairs

6:30pm – 7:45pm / £7.50, £5.00

Russia is reported to be waging a campaign of airspace incursions and military provocations across a Europe that is re-arming, while President Trump makes claim on Greenland. Can, and will, Europe fight on two fronts and how ready is it for war?

[NATIONAL THEATRE OF SCOTLAND] 20



ONE HUNDRED VOICES

Interactive Installation

12 – 28 Aug 2026

Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh

nationaltheatrescotland.com

BOOK YOUR TICKETS NOW AT FESTIVALOFPOLITICS.SCOT

National Theatre of Scotland is co-funded by
 Scottish Government
 Rìghinn na h-Alba

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EXHIBITIONS AND PANEL EVENTS

One Hundred Voices

12 – 28 August

As part of the Caring Scotland project, **One Hundred Voices** is an interactive, audio-guided installation, bringing creative insight into living in the care system created by Nicola McCartney and team of theatre artists. Step into an immersive experience which walks you through an intimate landscape of memory, resilience and imagination, drawn from the lives of one hundred voices from Scotland's Care Experienced community. Fragments of stories unfold across sound, light, and space, as the audience journeys through a series of spaces.

Caring Scotland is a National Theatre of Scotland project, produced in partnership with **Who Cares? Scotland** and the **National Library of Scotland**, funded with an award from **The National Lottery Heritage Fund**.

Advance booking required.



Caring Scotland?

In partnership with The National Theatre of Scotland

Monday 17 August

5:30pm – 6:30pm / FREE

Alongside the One Hundred Voices installation, explore the testimony of Scotland's Care Experienced community in this panel session. The Promise sets out that by 2030 every child in Scotland will grow up loved, safe and respected, to realise their full potential. Yet, over half of Scotland's looked-after children live in the most deprived areas, are more likely to have additional support needs, lower school attendance and higher rates of exclusion. How far has Scotland come in fulfilling The Promise?

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Scotland 2026 – who gets to belong?

In partnership with The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Monday 17 August

5:30pm – 6:30pm / FREE

This panel event will explore some of the issues touched on in the Mother Glasgow artworks. With growing polarisation, mistrust, and a sense of being 'left behind' for many communities, how can Scotland bring diverse voices together, move from division to empathy, and ensure community voices are at the heart of decision-making?

Mother Glasgow

11 – 28 August

Mother Glasgow is a series of striking new portraits by artist Gerard M Burns celebrating women who have made Scotland, and Glasgow in particular, their home. Ranging in age, background and profession, these vibrant and personal stories tell how people have brought their experiences and culture to Scotland, helping to shape it socially, culturally and creatively.



Politics in the making

This drop-in collage workshop, run by the Scottish Political Archive at the University of Stirling and supported by the British Academy, invites you to layer, arrange, and reimagine what politics means to you right now. No artistic experience needed – just curiosity.

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TICKETING INFO

All tickets can be booked online at festivalofpolitics.scot and will be available to buy up to **one hour** before each event.

A limited number of tickets can be booked in person on the day at the Ticket Desk in the Festival Café Bar. Arrival at least 30 minutes prior to the event starting is advised.

Other information

Information is correct at the time of going to print but please check the online programme in advance of attending at festivalofpolitics.scot

We reserve the right to change or cancel any event. We cannot offer refunds or exchanges unless an event is cancelled.

Scan here to visit our Festival of Politics website



Pricing

Concessions are available to children aged 5–16 years, Young Scot card holders, people aged 60 and over, students, unemployed people and disabled people.

Access to the Festival Café Bar is **FREE**.

Contact us

If you have any queries or are unable to book online, you can call us Monday to Friday 10:00am – 4:00pm on **0800 092 7500** or email festivalofpolitics@parliament.scot

Privacy

Our privacy and data-sharing policy can be found at parliament.scot/privacy



CRÈCHE

The crèche will be open on Thursday 27 August between 10:00am and 6:00pm for anyone who wishes to book a place.

Please contact **0131 348 6192** or email creche@parliament.scot in advance.

FESTIVAL CAFÉ BAR

Join us in the lively **FREE** Festival Café Bar for a programme of free entertainment.

For the full line-up please visit festivalofpolitics.scot

Thank you to all our partners:



WORLD PRESS PHOTO

EXHIBITION 2026

19 Oct
– 7 Nov

The Scottish
Parliament

Free Entry

Monday–Saturday

parliament.scot/wpp

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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

STRATEGIC PARTNERS



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