



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Festival of Politics 2024 Report

23 January 2025

Reference: SPCB (2025) Paper 2

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the SPCB with a summary of the 2024 Festival of Politics.

Background

2. As agreed by the SPCB, the 2024 Festival took place in-person with the majority of events filmed and later uploaded to the Scottish Parliament's YouTube channel and available to view on the Festival of Politics website. Held over five days between Monday 19 and Friday 23 August, there were 32 events in total.
3. The Festival programme reflected the 25 years of the Scottish Parliament; and the 20 years of both the Holyrood building as well as responding to contemporary political, ethical and social issues.
4. The Festival brought together 18 Members who chaired one or more of the 32 panel discussions and *In Conversation with ...* events, and academics, young people, performers, former politicians, activists, and specialist practitioners from across the arts and medical world to debate the issues presented in this year's programme.
5. As with previous years, the Festival worked in partnership with five 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 Member Maggie Chapman MSP chairing all three Festival sessions on AI. The Futures Forum also partnered with the Festival on *The Scottish Parliament at 25* closing event.
7. The Festival's other main partner was Healing Arts Scotland (HAS) with whom it partnered for the first time on a series of events marking the country-wide, week-long activation across Scotland celebrating and advocating for improved

physical, mental and social health through the arts. The opening performance was on Monday 19 August and marked a continued partnership with Edinburgh International Festival alongside Jameel Arts and Health Lab and the World Health Organisation, with a new dance created by Scottish Ballet and a cast of community dancers, NHS staff and young musical performers taking place in the Landscaped Gardens. Additionally, we partnered with HAS on *Dementia – the power of dance and personalised playlists*; *The power of age friendly communities and the arts*; and *Place and displacement: reconnecting to the world through arts*; and finally *Mental health and young people*.

8. A partnership with the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Young Women's Movement also generated four panel events with members of both organisations sitting as panellists and/or chairs on the subject of *Consent*; *Sexism in the workplace*; *25 Years of the Scottish Parliament – where are the young women?*; and *Mental health and young people*.
9. The Festival also partnered with a record 17 further organisations according to their associated subject or academic specialism in relation to the panel discussion topic. They included Benedetta Tagliabue – EMBT Architects; the Centre for Responsible Debate; Childlight Global Child Safety Institute; the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights; CoSLA; The Consulate General of Spain; Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier, Glasgow and Stirling; The Law Society of Scotland; the Royal Society of Edinburgh; the Scottish Council on Global Affairs; the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics; the Scottish Older People's Assembly; and the Scottish Youth Film Foundation.
10. This marked the second year of a partnership with the Scottish Youth Film Foundation (SYFF) that continues to build engagement not only with the diverse range of young people taking part in the Festival project but significantly this year, the organisation's links to high school pupils from West Lothian and East Lothian who attended as Festival audience members this year. There is more information about the partnership below.
11. The Festival Cafe Bar also hosted a programme of live choirs and musicians reflecting the overall Festival programme. This included Choir 21, the Makaton signing and singing group of young people from Down's Syndrome Scotland; Earth in Common, the climate choir; a light-hearted short opera performance by Scottish Opera; an acoustic duo MixTape; and a multi-generational ukelele orchestra from Fife. The three visual exhibitions included HAS's project bringing together participatory arts and health initiatives from across Scotland by the International Teaching Artists Collaborative to exhibit artworks by everyone from Project Ability to Bazooka Arts. The second exhibition was a showcase of archive materials by the Scottish Youth Parliament, held by the National Library of Scotland and selected by a group of MSYPs to celebrate the Youth Parliament's 25th Anniversary. The final exhibition titled *Where do you see Scotland in 2049?* was a collaboration between the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Edinburgh International Book Festival to encourage MSYPs to share their visions for Scotland in 2049.

12. The Festival Climate Café took place for the first time in partnership with the Climate Café for one day during the Festival, with representatives from the Climate Café leading on information sessions attended by SPCB staff as well as a Festival audience and high school pupils. A Scottish Parliament Climate Café has subsequently been established and meets monthly.

Issues and Options

Evaluation

13. The five days of the Festival saw over 5,000 people visit the Scottish Parliament with almost 2,000 attending Festival panel sessions and many more relaxing in the Festival Cafe Bar, as well as hundreds more who formed the external audience to enjoy the HAS opening event in the Landscaped Gardens.
14. It is also worth noting that as with the online audience in 2023, many thousands took advantage of the free-to-access Festival resources uploaded to the Scottish Parliament's YouTube channel and sptv, and the Festival of Politics website. As of December 2024, just over 7,800 people have viewed the Festival events. This figure includes the 1,017 views of the nine BSL interpreted Festival events uploaded in late November.
15. As with all other Festivals, a survey was conducted with attendees. This was the second year that surveys were issued automatically by email to attendees who had booked their Festival event via the online ticketing platform and resulted in 184 replies. A small number of paper surveys were also made available in the venue for attendees to complete. Both methods resulted in 207 surveys being submitted.
16. Although slightly fewer festivalgoers completed the online and print surveys this year, the results indicated that almost 53% had previously attended a Festival event, a 3% increase on 2023 figures indicating that the Festival is continuing to engage audiences and grow new ones. Attendees registering their rating of the Festival event as very good or good rose by 2% to 93%.

Public Engagement Strategy

17. 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. The number of partners this year increased to 24 including exhibitions in the Festival Café Bar, and multiple events with some partners. There were an additional five Cross Party Group inspired Festival events on topics as diverse as health inequalities; space, Scotland's games eco-system; St Andrew's Day; and culture and communities. The diverse range of partnerships with everyone from universities to the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, arts organisations, COSLA, and youth organisations,

each with its own audience, all ensure that the Festival is extending its overall audience reach.

18. The continuing partnership with the SYFF also aims to break down barriers of geography, race, disability, or socio-economic circumstances that stop young people from accessing the creative industries. Six young people, including new Scots, were recruited from across Scotland from various backgrounds. The young people were based at the Parliament for five days and produced three 30-minute and one 50-minute programmes aired over the five days. The output included interviews with Festival speakers, discussion, and vox-pops with the audience.
19. Additionally, this year, SYFF's partnerships with Modern Studies students across West and East Lothian schools, enabled almost 70 high school students and three teachers to attend the Festival on Thursday 22 August. Feedback from students and teachers alike was positive with an immediate commitment to returning to the Festival with more pupils in 2025. Pupils direct feedback centred on the accessibility they felt the Festival offered as a way into learning about the politics that impacted their day-to-day lives. The panel sessions on *Sexism in the workplace* and *Global politics in 2024* were highlighted of particular relevance.

BSL

20. The Events and Exhibitions Team continue to work with the Parliament's BSL Officer in advance to ensure that the events the BSL community wanted to see interpreted as part of the Festival programme were actioned. As advised, the Festival Team ensured all BSL users were allocated complimentary tickets to ensure there were no financial barriers to accessing the Festival. A total of nine events were interpreted this year, an increase on five in 2023. The BSL interpreted events uploaded to YouTube and the Festival site via sptv have attracted an additional 1,017 views as of December 2024.

Communications Activity

23. As in previous years, the Parliament Communications Office (PCO) promoted the Festival by delivering a comprehensive and integrated marketing and communications strategy. They produced 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 high quality graphics for sharing across digital and social networks and contacting organisations working in the relevant fields.
24. The results of this were as follows:
 - 58 per cent of those who attended saw marketing or publicity about the Festival, which was an increase of almost 9 per cent from last year. Social

media was where most people saw information about the Festival, closely followed by digital advertising.

- The Festival has a very engaged network via our email subscriber list which has over 3,000 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 43 per cent and a click-through rate of 16 per cent which is high when measured against industry standards.
- In total 9,182 users visited the site, compared to 7,323 last year – an increase of 25%. Traffic to the website came from the following sources, in highest order: organic social, organic search, via email, through referrals or via our paid for search.
- 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, referrals from our paid digital ads, LinkedIn and the Parliament's website followed by link clicks from social posts.
- 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 95,000; on Facebook our content had over 45,000 views and on LinkedIn 60,000 views.
- X is the platform we tend to put most resource into given that's where our partners tend to operate from. There were 67 posts made on X to promote #FOP2024, six from the main account and the rest from the Visit account. In total, these gained 164,205 impressions and 3,274 interactions. Those included 183 retweets, 59 quote tweets, 267 likes and 27 replies.

Governance

21. As previously agreed, the programme for the 2024 Festival was developed by parliamentary officials in consultation with the Clerk/Chief Executive and the Presiding Officer.

Resource Implications

22. The total budget allocated for the 2024 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 five-day Festival. Through very tight management of resources and in particular the reduction of travel and accommodation costs for participants we were able to bring the Festival in on budget.

Publications Scheme

25. This paper can be published.

Events and Exhibitions Team
December 2024