

FESTIVAL OF POLITICS 2016 AND 2017

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this Paper is to provide the SPCB with a summary of the 2016 Festival of Politics and to seek their views on dates and initial outline and theme for the 2017 Festival of Politics.

Festival of Politics 2016

2. The Festival of Politics 2016 took place from Thursday 18 to Saturday 20 August and was very well attended over all three days. There were 31 events including four Debating Chamber events, a themed Family Day on the Saturday and film and TV screenings.

3. This year's Festival theme was the Architecture of Democracy. Partnerships with organisations including the Festival of Architecture (FoA) 2016; Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE); Beyond Borders Scotland; and Scotland's Futures Forum (SFF) reflected aspects of this democratic theme through associated exhibitions and panel events.

4. The FoA partnership resulted in a successful Scotstyle event and popular Lego™ and Minecraft™ discussion. Equally, the partnership with the RSE was fruitful in exploring aspects of democratic equality (*Scottish Solutions to the Refugee Crisis* and *Frontier Women – where are all the women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics?*), both of which sold out. The SFF partnership event *The Democratic Space* examining the history of democracy also sold out.

5. As well as debate and discussion and the TV and film strand there was focus on a Family Day Saturday with a Lego™ themed Festival Café Bar. The Lego™ related film screenings, an interactive Scotland map-build; related Minecraft™ workshops; and the Parliament's Clay Climate Change Challenge all attracted large numbers of the intended family audience. Anecdotally, a percentage of this audience were new visitors to the Parliament and reported being attracted by the free aspect of the programmed activities - specifically the Lego™ and Minecraft™.

6. Income from Festival ticket sales was up 12.6% on the previous year and numbers attending over the three days were also up by 11.4% to nearly 5,000 festivalgoers.

Media Coverage

7. Media coverage of this year's Festival launch with 15 pieces of printed coverage was significantly up on the previous two years neither of which saw any launch coverage. During the Festival itself, there were 16 pieces of print

coverage. Together with the BBC *Good Morning Scotland* (who broadcast live from the Garden Lobby on the first day of the Festival) audience equals a potential reach of over 900,000. Although this could indicate the topical and newsworthy value of the Festival panels' content, the fact that the Festival took place on a Thursday and Friday means that it was much more accessible to Holyrood based journalists and it's likely this was also a factor in our securing additional coverage this year.

8. It is worth noting from this year's survey that the same number of attendees (24%) use word-of-mouth to hear about the Festival as the printed Festival programme guide.

Days for Festival

9. This year's pilot in moving the Festival to run from Thursday to Saturday rather than Friday to Sunday was deemed successful. No negative feedback was received regarding impact on building users on Thursday or Friday and given the numbers over the three days increased and subsequent media coverage also increased we would recommend going forward that future festivals take place from Thursday to Saturday.

The SPCB is asked to consider this and agree that future three-day festivals take place from Thursday to Saturday.

Festival venues

10. Flexible use of venues was vital this year with events that had originally been scheduled for the Debating Chamber being switched to a theatre style in Committee Room 1 to accommodate audience numbers. Likewise, events that were originally scheduled for the Members' Room were elevated to the Debating Chamber due to popularity. This contributed positively to the increase in ticket sales.

Festival Café Bar

11. The Festival Café Bar programme proved more popular than previous years with increased audiences staying throughout the day on Friday and Saturday. This was due in part to the welcoming and professional staging design augmented by the comfortable furniture strategically positioned round the stage to create a "music club" environment. The decision to book musicians with their own in-built fan base such as Folksville also paid dividends with a loyal audience attending.

12. Also responding to previous audience feedback, the music programme was quieter than previous years with an emphasis on choirs and acoustic music. Provision was also made for designated quiet seating areas including Queensberry House Lounge enabling continuation of post-event discussion.

13. As part of the overall Festival experience we also had a number of exhibitions on display in the Festival Café Bar around one of the key strands – architecture – *Maggie's Just Incase*; *Scotstyle - Building the Century*; and an

interactive exhibit titled *Prospect North* from Architecture+Design Scotland. The first two exhibitions were complemented by related Festival events. A fourth exhibition, *Brick History*, depicting political figures and scenes in Lego™ was also complemented by a related Lego™ Festival panel event. Finally in TG20/21 we installed an artwork entitled *Its OK to Fail, 2015* by the artist Lydia Levett which festivalgoers had to go through en route to the Festival Café Bar.

14. It should be noted that the Festival Café Bar is now an integral part of the Festival with its free programme of entertainment, exhibitions, food, drink and space to discuss. It provides a valuable counterbalance to the paid-for events and serves both as a welcoming and inspiring space for post discussion as well as a standalone hub for those seeking free Festival entertainment.

15. This increase in audiences attending the Festival Café Bar entertainment is evidenced by the 15% increase in catering revenue compared to 2015 Festival of Politics.

Family Day Saturday

16. Anecdotal evidence reported huge popularity of the Family Day Saturday in attracting the desired young family audience. This audience counterbalanced the older demographic attending the panel events. While the free events and exhibitions taking place in the Festival Café Bar all had clear links to the overarching theme of the Festival (Architecture, Lego™, technology) this audience demarcation should be noted and borne in mind when programming for both the Family Days audience and the established Festival panel audience in the future. The crucial element being to use mainstream attraction (in this case Lego™) to unite both demographics in one space.

Communications and marketing

17. The communications and marketing for this year's Festival focussed on using a highly targeted approach to drive engagement, ticket sales and expenditure in the Festival Café Bar. Marketing saw us using a combination of digital and print media and, for the first time, high profile advertising on the exterior of the Parliament building. For the second year running, a media partnership with *The Scotsman* was also put in place which included the distribution of 40,000 copies of the Festival programme, promotion on Scotsman.com, and a series of adverts placed in the newspaper itself.

18. We also launched the Festival campaign two weeks earlier this year (in mid-June) and ran a sustained campaign throughout July and August to secure a high number of advance ticket sales. Overall 88% of tickets were sold in advance this year which is up from 79% in 2015. 10% of tickets were sold in the week immediately after the press and social media campaign launch underlining the need for a strong Festival launch event for the future. In PR terms the launch secured a good range of print coverage and pre-

Festival print coverage with a combined reach of more than half a million readers.

19. A similar targeted approach was taken to the use of social media with the audience for each event identified across all of the social media channels. These channels included the Parliament's Facebook page and The Festival of Politics' Twitter account and website. The newest of the Parliament's social media channels, Instagram was also used to promote the Festival. The results of this approach were encouraging, with engagement particularly strong on Facebook when it came to family engagement. Twitter engagement in particular was also very strong, with engagement up 84% on the previous year.

20. Finally, for the first time, we cross-promoted events this year so the Festival family events were promoted in the locational information for the Big Day Out event on Saturday 2 July as well as on a 'what's on' leaflet which included information on all our summer events.

Festival Evaluation

21. This year we piloted the use of a paper survey placed on audience seating. This direct approach resulted in a significant increase in the number of people completing the evaluation compared with online evaluations in previous years. A total number of 510 people completed the survey of which 61% were first time visitors to the Festival. This suggests that the diversity of issues covered in the Festival programme continues to attract new audiences to the event and to Parliament.

22. Of the 473 respondents who attended a ticketed event, 85% rated it as excellent or very good. This suggests that not only are the events and discussions well received but that the ticket prices are not too prohibitive.

23. Of the 431 who responded to the question on whether they would visit the Parliament again, 92% voted in the affirmative.

24. The Festival survey also indicated that over half (52.5%) of respondents are aged over-55 which is a similar demographic to that of other book and literary festivals. We are keen to nurture and build on this audience by playing to our strengths in programming future Festivals. Having built up knowledge of the type of event that will appeal to a Festival audience, a database of appropriately qualified academics and experts in a diverse range of fields, cemented by on-going links with external partners such as RSE and David Hume Institute, a tightly curated and unified Festival programme, bound together under one over-arching theme is key to its longevity and success.

25. Of the 510 respondents 39% (198) of them signed up to further information on events and exhibitions taking place at the Scottish parliament, including the Festival of Politics and have been to weekly the circulation list for TWISP.

26. According to the 454 respondents who gave their postcode to the Festival survey, 283 alone had EH postcodes, and the vast majority of the remaining postcodes given were in Fife and Glasgow, and a few in Aberdeen and Inverness. This would appear to indicate that the vast majority of Festival attendees are Scottish and located in the Central Belt which further indicates that the Festival is not dependent on visiting international August festival audiences alone to populate events.

Festival of Politics 2017

Dates

27. For the 2017 Festival there is a suggestion to decouple from the Edinburgh festivals in August and pilot a move to October recess using the three day Thursday to Saturday format.

28. Whilst the August dates link with the Edinburgh festivals, the current timing can prove problematic in terms of attracting high profile speakers and politicians who are often on summer recess in August.

29. Accommodation and travel costs are at a premium during Edinburgh's August festivals, therefore moving outwith this month could have budgetary savings.

30. Raising the Festival's profile in a crowded August marketplace can also prove challenging; the benefits of moving to October could raise the Festival's profile, and that of the Scottish Parliament, as it would be the only Festival taking place in Edinburgh at that time. The only other significant Festival that runs throughout Scotland during October is Luminate: Scotland's Creative Ageing Festival.

31. Other Edinburgh festivals such as the Edinburgh International Film Festival (June) and the Edinburgh International Science Festival (April) have successfully moved away from their traditional August date to stage festivals throughout the year.

32. October 2017 would also allow increased opportunities of working with Scottish Parliament committees as their work programmes will have been developed by this time.

33. The Festival's main venue, the Debating Chamber will be unavailable during the summer recess period. The closure of this venue would limit the Festival's ability to attract high profile participants and audiences exceeding 120 (Members' Room capacity) which subsequently impacts on generation of ticket income.

34. The last weekend of the October recess - Thursday 19 to Saturday 21 October 2017 – is recommended as it would avoid any potential clash with any likely party conferences which usually takes place on the middle weekend of the October recess.

35. Evaluation forms received in 2016 indicate that over 90% of Festival attendees are from Edinburgh or Central Scotland. This would indicate that by moving to an October date the Festival of Politics 2017 would not lose an audience share composed largely of holidaying UK or international attendees.

36. We propose to retain the dates for the 2017 World Press Photo Exhibition as holding the exhibition in August maximises visitors – both national and international - to the Parliament. The dates are Friday 4 to Saturday 26 August 2017.

The SPCB is invited to consider and agree that the 2017 Festival of Politics takes place over three days during October recess - Thursday 19 to Saturday 21 October 2017

Structure, Format and Ticketing

37. This Paper proposes a continuation of previous years with the Festival generating and developing panels itself which leads to a cohesive overall theme under which all panels within the Festival fall.

38. We recommend continuing the format of panels composed of academics, experts and commentators as this generates lively and robust debate covering all sides of an issue that Festival audiences obviously enjoy as evidenced in survey responses.

39. The ticketing structure piloted in 2015 and adopted in 2016 resulted in a 12.6% increase in ticket revenue compared to 2015. We would propose following the same ticketing structure for 2017.

40. It is recommended that no venue is specified in the programme in advance in order to build in flexibility dependent on event popularity to allow maximum attendance for events by moving them to larger venues accordingly.

Theme

41. It is proposed that the 2017 Festival of Politics embraces its 13th birthday by celebrating a “teenage” theme in its widest sense. From pushing boundaries and challenging the norms, the Festival would embrace rebellion in all its political and cultural manifestations. For example, the invention of the teenager in the 1940s; through to the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Summer of Love and Summer of American Race Riots, right up to the present day, thus programming would appeal to “teenagers” of all ages. The revolutionary theme might also be explored through the democratic legacy of the centenary of the Russian Revolution in November 2017.

42. The teenage theme would allow for potential engagement opportunities with July 1 Babies who would celebrate their 18th birthdays in 2017; it also primes the Festival for the Year of Young People in 2018. 2017 has also been designated the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, which again

would chime with the proposed Festival's theme in respect of the fields of History and Heritage.

The SPCB is asked to consider this and agree that the 2017 Festival of Politics central theme would be related to a "teenage" theme linked to the history and heritage aspects of the 2017 Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology.

Partnerships

43. The 2017 Festival of Politics also provides an ideal opportunity to extend our existing partnerships with key stakeholders such as YoungScot and the Royal Society of Edinburgh's youth strand Young RSE to create a relevant programme for a young audience. We would seek to co-create a number of panels with YoungScot to ensure relevant subject matter and buy-in from the youth audience the panels would seek to attract in terms of panellists and audience.

44. An additional partnership with Luminate the creative ageing festival that runs throughout the month of October across Scotland also presents an opportunity to counter-balance the teen theme with joint-working across the ages. This strand would also appeal to the 57% of Festival 2016 survey respondents who fall into the over-55 age-group.

45. Further relevant partnerships with organisations such as Carnegie UK Trust; David Hume Institute; Economic and Social Research Council; and the John Smith Centre for Public Service at the University of Glasgow would all be explored.

46. We would further seek to work with the Scotland's Futures Forum and SPICe Knowledge Exchange to build upon the Parliament's overall academic engagement strategy.

Governance Issues

47. There are no governance issues in relation to the content for this Paper. Governance issues will be covered in full when the full 2017 Festival of Politics Paper is presented to the SPCB in due course.

Publication Scheme

48. This Paper should not be published until the 2017 Festival of Politics programme is announced.

Next Steps

49. The programme for the 2017 Festival of Politics will continue to be developed by parliamentary officials in consultation with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Presiding Officer; reporting back to the SPCB by end May 2017 with the full programme.

Decision

50. The SPCB is asked to consider this Paper and the key points raised within and to agree that:

50.1 future three-day festivals take place from Thursday to Saturday;

50.2 for 2017, the Festival of Politics takes place during October recess from Thursday 19 to Saturday 21 October 2017; and

50.3 the central theme is “teenage” inspired and links with the history and heritage aspects of the 2017 Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology.

EVENTS AND EXHIBITIONS TEAM
December 2016