



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Festival of Politics 2021

24 June 2021

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Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this Paper is to update the SPCB on planning for the 2021 Festival of Politics as agreed by the SPCB on 4 March 2021 as part of the consideration of the paper, A Route Map to and Through COP26.
2. In light of the uncertainty regarding regulations on social distancing for Autumn 2021 and resourcing pressures on parliamentary teams supporting parliamentary business and major events in early October and November; a five-day online Festival running from the evening of Wednesday 20 to Sunday 24 October 2021 (second week of October recess) is proposed.

Issues and options

Timing

3. The proposed timing would mean the resumption both of the Festival's regular October recess slot; and the midweek panels favoured by earlier versions of the Festival in previous Sessions. By staging two or three online Festival sessions each evening on Wednesday 20 and Thursday 21 October; building to a fuller programme on Friday 22 through to Sunday 24 October, we can maximise the opportunities to engage, hopefully affording Members more flexibility to take part while taking into account available resources.
4. Given that the Festival falls in the middle of two major events: Session 6 Opening Ceremony on Saturday 2 October; and the GLOBE International Legislators' Summit on Friday 5 and Saturday 6 November 2021; the Events and Exhibitions Team are mindful in considering the pressures, both on parliamentary colleagues' and its own staffing resource, in the requirement to deliver a Festival and these major events. Therefore, an online Festival taking place the second week of October recess is the optimum time.
5. It is important the Festival takes place as part of the national conversation around the routemap to and through the COP26 (1 to 12 November) as it uniquely offers a balanced and neutral place for the Parliament and people to

discuss the key issues on the climate emergency together. For the Festival audience, it is an opportunity to hear the facts from authoritative and neutral sources and be empowered to engage with the Parliament charged with making the climate emergency legislative changes post-Conference and throughout Session 6.

Online

6. Having staged an online Festival in 2020 using the chosen parliamentary digital platform, it is a proven model that engages effectively and inclusively with the public. The online approach further democratises the accessibility to Festival audiences across Scotland - and internationally - as October's public health regulations may mean that regions and areas across Scotland are operating under varying restrictions. That, in turn, may limit the ability of some people to travel to the Parliament building and take part in an in-person Festival event.
7. Planning for an autumn Festival is required to start by end June at the latest, and in light of the fluctuating public health situation in Scotland, an online Festival would future-proof this year's event. This means that irrespective of the public health and social distancing relating to COVID-19 in October, an online Festival guarantees the health and safety of panellists, audience and SPCB staff alike.
8. As the SPCB paper February 2020 reported, the major advantages of an online Festival lie in the level of national public engagement, (except for two postcode areas in Scotland) evidenced in the 2020 Festival survey feedback. Also significant among survey respondents in 2020, were those with disabilities who stated it was their first time in engaging with the Festival; alongside other respondents who cited time, travel, and cost as previous barriers to attendance.
9. Planning for an online Festival, recognises the Festival 2020 survey feedback where a significant percentage of respondents expressed willingness to engage online as an acceptable substitute *until* an in-person Festival could proceed safely. It is expected that all future Festivals will include an element of online participation to ensure as wide a reach as possible across Scotland from attendees whose preference on travel, cost, time and convenience means they could continue to engage with a Festival online.
10. Given the Festival's proposed climate emergency theme linked to the COP26, the lower carbon footprint of an online Festival in minimising travel by speakers and audience to the Parliament building also meets with the Scottish Parliament's Sustainable Development strategy for Session 6.
11. An online Festival of Politics is in keeping with other festivals operating in the Edinburgh area during summer this year. Edinburgh Art Festival (29 July – 29 August) is promising an online programme of events and digital presentations complemented by exhibitions staged in visual art spaces across the city; Edinburgh International Festival (7 - 29 August) is planning for socially-distanced in-person events held in outdoor bespoke pavilions; the Edinburgh International Book Festival (14 - 30 August) is moving to an online programme, but with the hope of in-person events to be held in the grounds of the Edinburgh

College of Art, if regulations permit, while the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo has cancelled for a second year due to uncertainty.

Theme and Content

12. This year's Festival theme is the climate and ecological emergency and green recovery, as applied to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It aims to offer a robust and critical platform for the public and Parliament to come together as a precursor to COP26 taking place in Glasgow.
13. The Festival's key message and tone is to present the facts and narratives around the climate and ecological emergency clearly and authoritatively from experts in the field who can communicate to a wide public audience engagingly. The aim is to inform, inspire, and empower a Festival audience to make personal choices and behavioural changes on how they will choose to work, live, eat, shop, travel.
14. A series of non-climate emergency panels on timeous political and socially relevant topics will also form part of the Festival programme of about 30 panels and *In Conversation with ...* events. These would include two of the three key areas already identified by SPICe as priorities for Session 6 and include: COVID-19 and the road to recovery (the focus of the 2020 Festival); and the devolution settlement post EU exit and UK relations. Among other sessions would be panels on: international politics on the future of Europe; the future of Africa as a global power; disability and employment; political poetry; male violence; to the UN International Year of Peace and Trust.

Parliamentary and Public Engagement

15. One or two Festival panel sessions may form part of the online engagement currently being developed by the Public Engagement Group to run over summer recess in support of the Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy for Session 6.
16. An online Festival also presents the opportunity to promote existing online engagement resources on the Festival site including a virtual tour of the Parliament; together with podcasts or products that will be developed over summer recess; and a broadcast version of the Presiding Officer's welcome to the Festival.
17. The Festival would look to build on the success of previous Festivals where committee Conveners chaired panels that, where possible, matched the respective committee portfolio. This knowledge base reflecting the Member's particular area of interest significantly benefited the level of chairing. Members working remotely during the October recess can of course chair Festival panels irrespective of their geographical constituency or regional base with the online model.

Partnerships

18. Building on the success of the 2020 Festival partnership with the Parliament's think tank, Scotland's Futures Forum, when the content of its report *Scotland 2030*, was the focus of panels that discussed solutions to climate change; the economy and well-being, we propose a similar umbrella partnership for the 2021 Festival. This permits a natural continuation of the interlinked themes raised by the Futures Forum, that also chime with the overarching UN Sustainable Goals that serve as a template for this year's Festival. Further to this, the Parliament's International Relations Office will also partner on a number of climate-related and internationally-focussed panels. This allows the Festival to tap into an even broader spectrum of national and international speakers, and consequently increase audiences.
19. A further informal partnership with SPICe is also proposed. Given the wealth of knowledge generated by SPICe colleagues and its reputation as an authoritative and neutral political source, there is an opportunity for the Festival to promote the work of SPICe to a wider audience. This would involve matching relevant SPICe briefings, graphics or output with a Festival panel exploring the same topic, providing an opportunity for audience members to verify or expand their knowledge on the particular subject.
20. The decision to partner with a relevant organisation for each of the Festival panels in 2020 resulted in cross-promotion and maximising of audience numbers, epitomised with a 20% audience share resident in Glasgow for the first time, as a result of partnering with organisations based in the city. A similar model is recommended for this year, with partner organisations often putting forward a panellist expert in the relevant field to cement the partnership.
21. Among the current list of potential partners are organisations and educational centres of excellence in innovation and research on climate change solutions. These include but are not limited to: Royal Society of Edinburgh; Zero Waste Scotland; Royal Scottish Geographical Society; Edinburgh Festivals; International Labour Organisation, a number of Scottish universities including The James Hutton Institute; Edinburgh Climate Change Institute; The John Smith Centre for Public Service; and NESTA Scotland.

BSL

22. The Events and Exhibitions Team and the Parliament's BSL officer would like to build on the achievements of the 2020 Festival where 25% of the programme had BSL interpretation by ensuring that the BSL community can access the Festival events via the best possible online platform and take an increased role in suggesting a number of panels that would be of particular relevance to the community.

Ticketing

23. As with the 2020 online Festival it is proposed that this year's Festival is free of charge with free tickets pre-booked using ticket website which will increase our marketing and potential reach. The loss of expected Festival revenue will be off-set by savings gained on audio-visual suppliers and panellist travel and accommodation

Communications

24. As an online event it is natural that the majority of our communications to promote Festival of Politics will be digital. It will allow us to build on last year's Festival, where we effectively targeted people of varying backgrounds, ages and locations across Scotland through effective digital engagement using our online channels and existing email subscription service. This would be supported by seeking coverage via media outlets, although plans for this will depend on the programme itself.
25. As identified throughout the Paper, an online Festival allows us to plan our communications strategy without the added complication of the nature and format of the event needing to change because of the uncertainty around COVID-19 restrictions. This allows us to clearly communicate with our target audience our offering for the Festival this year.
26. The use of partner organisations and effectively utilising their communications channels was an effective way to reach specific audiences in 2020 and we will continue to build on this for this year's Festival.
27. Given that the focus of our marketing activity on digital and online formats, we can realise significant cost savings by not having to produce hard copy marketing material that is necessary for an in-person event. This also supports the sustainability objectives.

Governance

28. As with previous Festivals, the programme for the 2021 Festival will continue to be developed by parliamentary officials in consultation with the Clerk/Chief Executive and the Presiding Officer; reporting back to the SPCB in due course with the full programme of worked up panel content and partners.

Resource implications

29. Having consulted with internal parliamentary teams the online Festival can be produced and delivered within existing resources without impacting resources of other parliamentary teams.
30. Following the example set in 2020 when the Events and Exhibitions Team; together with our Futures Forum partner, ran the online Festival using the Parliament's chosen online platform, the Team would manage the Festival production in the same way in October 2021.

Publication Scheme

31. This paper should not be published until the full 2021 Festival of Politics programme has been announced.

Next steps

32. The programme for the 2021 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 in due course with the full programme of venues, partners and worked up panel content and panellists.

Decision

33. The SPCB is asked to consider this Paper and the key points raised within and to agree that parliamentary officials take forward an online Festival of Politics on the dates proposed Wednesday 20 to Sunday 24 October 2021 inclusive.

Events and Exhibitions Team

June 2020