

# Minutes

## Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Fifty Fifth Annual General Meeting of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd  
Company Number: SC046605  
Scottish Charity Number: SC002995

Date: Tuesday 20 August 2024 at 12pm

Venue: Main Council Chamber, City Chambers, 253 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1YJ

### Present

Benny Higgins (Chair)  
Apphia Campbell  
Anthony Alderson  
Colin Adams  
Gillian Harkness  
Hazel Anderson  
Harun Musho'd  
James Mackenzie  
Julianne Reddin  
Neil Weir  
Pax Lowey  
Sarah-Louise Young  
Suzanna Rosenthal  
Tara Stapleton  
Valerie Urquhart

### Membership

Xela Batchelder  
Lorna Brian  
Andrew Girvan  
Elise Harris  
Thomas Hawton  
Lizzy Lenco  
Martin Powell  
Christopher Richardson  
James Seabright  
Bridget Stevens  
Ged Welch  
Richard Williamson  
Allan Wilson  
Danny Worthington  
Marlene Zwickler

### Public

Luth Wolf  
Brian Ferguson  
Sophie McClung  
Camron Fox  
Scott Spears

### Online

Emily Davis  
Gary Staerck  
Nigel Lowey  
Nancy Gibbs  
Stella Graham  
John Faulkner  
Lorraine Hoodless

### Apologies

Tari Lang and Pip Utton.

### In attendance – EFFS Staff

Shona McCarthy (Chief Executive)  
Lyndsey Jackson (Deputy Chief Executive)  
Susan Russell (Head of Communications, Marketing & Sponsorship)  
Chris Snow (Head of Artist Services)  
Jane Colton (Head of Box Office Services)

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Westaly Duignan (Head of Fundraising and Development)  
Sorcha Judge (Media Officer)  
Rory Bryant (Sponsorship Manager)  
Weronica Michailidu (Marketing Coordinator)  
Amy Simons (Operations Officer)  
Dominique Hughes (HR Manager, maternity cover)  
Helen Darling (Executive Assistant)  
Olivia Aarons (HR & Finance Officer)  
Rachel Hains (Media Assistant)

### Online

Justin Connolly (Retail & E-Commerce Manager)  
Stefano Modica Ragusa (Digital Marketing Manager)  
Rachel Poxon (Website and App Manager)  
John Pettie (Business Systems Manager)

### Preamble

The Chair, Benny Higgins welcomed Fringe Society members and members of the public, Board members and Fringe Society executives to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2024. The meeting was being recorded as part of the minute-taking process, so that it is accurate. The meeting was also being live streamed for those attending online. He noted that he had received apologies from Board members Tari Lang and Pip Utton.

### Notice

The Notice of the AGM was taken as read. The vote closed at 12pm and the results would be shared with the membership in due course.

### Minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting

The Chair asked if there were any queries regarding the completeness or accuracy in relation to the minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM). James Seabright noted that he attended the AGM, but his name was not on the list. The Chair assured that his name would be added to the list.

The minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting were taken as read and approved.

**Decision:** The minutes of the 2023 AGM were unanimously approved. Proposed by James Seabright and seconded by Ged Welch.

### 2023 Audited Accounts

All members had received the Audited Financial Statements for year ended 30 November 2023. The Chair invited Valerie Urquhart, Chair of the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee (FAR) to speak to the accounts. Valerie explained that members have access to these accounts through

the membership forum, and these are not for approval here but for sharing and information. The accounts cover the period December 2022 to November 2023.

Valerie outlined the following key points for members:

- 2023 year end position was a deficit of approx. £200K. Budget planning at the start of the year projected a deficit of £500K so considerable progress and improvement was made in year.
- 2023 was the first year since covid without any recovery funds and the budget was delivered against a challenging backdrop of high inflation, cost of living and challenging funding and income generation markets.
- Valerie also noted that, despite the Fringe Society's own economic challenges the charity had maintained standstill fees for artists (since 2008) and audiences and was returning £600K net of VAT back to the Fringe economy through the handling fee rebate.
- Valerie noted that, while there was a significant improvement, the yearend position was still a deficit which continues to present challenges, not least of all in generating funds to repay the £1Mn loan from Scottish Government. The Fringe Society's reserves stand at around £200K and there is a planned deficit in 2024 which will reduce this to £0, which is a considerable challenge.
- Valerie highlighted the work of the Fringe Society in supporting the wider fringe ecology, including distributing PLaCE funds, the handling fee rebate and securing £1.1Mn for the Keep it Fringe fund, which directly supports Fringe artists.
- Valerie noted that, since the pandemic, the Fringe Society had distributed over £5Mn to the Fringe community.
- Valerie closed by noting that there was a lot of hard work to be done on the future business model of the Fringe Society to restore reserves and review the levers for change that provide a more sustainable model.

**Question:** What is the expected reserves amount, and how is this expressed – typically in charities this is expressed as a quantity of months running costs.

**Response:** We reviewed the reserve policy in the current year and the aim is at least over the next five years, to return the reserve level to pre-COVID levels, around £750K. It was noted that this was three to four months of operating costs but also needed to account for repayment of the £1Mn loan at £200K per year from 2026. The Fringe Society also needs to invest in key areas of delivery, such as technology, as well as ensure adequate cash to manage risks and liabilities.

### Chief Executive's Report

Shona McCarthy, Chief Executive outlined both a review of 2023 alongside the highlights and challenges of 2024 to date.

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Shona opened with a thank you to the Fringe at large for restoring the joy to the Fringe in 2023, and recognised the hard work and tenacity of everyone who takes part in the Fringe to make it happen in spite of the many challenges.

2023's Fringe hosted 45,182 performances of shows in 248 venues last year, with 308 free shows and 463 pay-what-you-want/pay-what-you-can shows. 2023 saw the pilot of the Keep it Fringe Fund, supported by a generous donation from our President, Phoebe Waller-Bridge. This pilot was critical to the success of the new funding from UK Government and the volume of applications received in 2023 was testament to the need for support directly to artists.

2023 saw the return of the Fringe app, which was affordable thanks to the prudent budget management of the team in 2022. This was delivered in very tight turnaround and with significant information and ticketing complexities to consider.

Our artist support team dealt with over 25,000 enquiries over the year, a testament to the scale and the importance with which this Festival is held across the whole creative community, locally, nationally and internationally. These artists can avail of all of services, which in 2023 included a extensive support for mental health through Health in Mind.

2023's Fringe Central Welcome Address by Le Gateau Chocolat was emotive, provocative and brilliant, and launched Fringe Central, which supported over 1,600 participants in their Fringe journey. Some of our brilliant work last year was our access support, support for artists of colour, and support for the LGBTQ community through our strategic partnerships with Birds of Paradise, Nouveau Riche, and Somewhere. There is so much more to do in all these areas and we are committed to ensuring that this Festival lives by its mantra to give anyone a stage and everyone a seat.

Fringe Connect, our online community, reached a mammoth 7,500 registered users last year, we had 840 reviewers and broadcasters representing 400 local, national and international media outlets.

Our arts industry returned to the festival in droves, alongside showcases from Korea, Australia, Quebec, Taiwan, Ireland and Denmark, with 10% of the programme from the US.

The Made in Scotland showcase is a great example of international showcasing and is supported by Scottish Government through their Expo funds to support Scottish artists and the best of Scottish work at the Fringe. Since it began it has supported 259 shows from Scotland, and 100 of those have toured to over 40 countries. We are really proud of this showcase and urge Scottish Government to continue to invest in the Expo funds as it gives Scottish companies the chance to be supported and to have their work toured overseas.

Progress on access continues, with a 33% increase in our access bookings in 2023 and 1,300 performances that offered enhancements such as audio description, BSL or captioning. These successes are celebrated across the Fringe community but there is much, much more work to do to break down barriers to participation.

Our education and access work that we do year-round now has over 30 community partners and our Fringe Days Out programme gives vouchers to families and individuals and local communities to access the festival. We have had 16,000 Fringe Days Out so far, alongside focussed delivery days and attending local festivals and community events, such as Broomhouse, West Pilrig Park and Leith community Festival. This is alongside the work of our venues, particularly the Pleasance Theatre, and other initiatives, such as Fringe Cares, that presents Fringe artists in local care homes. 200 young people from our partnerships with schools performed on our community stages.

The 2023 bounce back of the Edinburgh Fringe was quite extraordinary but those within the community of the Fringe know this was hard won, and increasingly precarious.

For the Fringe Society this has included the lack of public sector support and the charity that supports the festival falling through the cracks of funding agencies, despite the enormous return on investment the Fringe delivers.

For the Fringe this also includes a lack of public sector investment and an unsympathetic policy environment that is driving up costs of accommodation, licencing, planning and other set up costs to untenable levels. The Fringe Society seeks to use its convening powers to influence change, which has resulted in sourcing affordable accommodation through the partnership with Queen Margaret's University, the increased capacity at the University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University. These measures have really helped us to unlock some amount of affordable accommodation, but it is never enough. Registration fees for artists and shows have been frozen for seventeen years and a cap on handling fee income ensures that more of the box office income can be put back into the ecology of the venues. The Fringe Society, as a result of these interventions, continues to operate on a deficit, which is not sustainable.

The Fringe Society has been working through the drawdown of the UK government's capital invest in the New Fringe Central, which has evolved to include the repurposing of £1Mn to support artists through the Keep it Fringe fund in 2024 and 2025. Beyond the Fringe there will be updates on Fringe Central as the project progresses, with the core principles delivery focussed on access and sustainability.

Key issues for 2024 include the cost of accommodation, connectivity in the city, new revenue streams through corporate partnerships, lack of public investment and a continuously challenging policy environment.

For the long term future, the recovery needed for the Fringe Society necessitates a review all of our cost base and services in the coming weeks and months including box office handling fees, commissions and registration fees for 2025/2026.

Shona paid tribute to the charitable work of the Fringe with a few examples; Conor Burns (amongst others) collecting for local foodbanks, Pleasance's ongoing fundraising for Waverley Care, Myra's Story at Assembly have been collecting every year for people who suffer with addiction and have raised hundreds of thousands for charity and Underbelly's own Big Brain Benefit to raise money for the Big Brain Trust. The level of support and funding that is raised

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for charities right across this Festival is remarkable given their own economic challenges. Shona also acknowledged the generous offer of support from James Seabright for the Keep it Fringe fund to mark his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of producing work at the Fringe.

Finally, Shona thanked her team for all the work that they do year-round. She also thanked the Board of the Fringe Society, who particularly in tough times take matters that are contentious seriously, consider them and help the Society to come to collective decisions.

The Chair thanked Shona and noted that that the formal business of the AGM was closed. It was a great privilege for him to be the Chair of the Fringe Society Board which served the wonderful purpose of being an essential component of what goes on every year in August in the City of Edinburgh. We often, as we should, focus on the things that need repair, we look at the things that we need to be resolved, but let us not forget what a joyous and incredible success the Edinburgh Fringe is for the city and for the country. It represents Scotland so well, both at home and internationally. In order for that to happen, it requires the whole ecosystem to work together in a way that is quite extraordinary, whether it is the performers or the venues or the producers and directors, everybody has to play a part and it puts together something that is not simply the biggest performing arts festival in the world, but one that is arguably the best, one that is held up as an example to many others around the world. Shona who speaks to people around the world often, does encounter the huge inspiration that we give beyond our own shores for other festivals.

He felt very strongly that well-being is such an important part of our world for our citizens and thankfully, and in some ways maybe it was one of the good things that came out of the pandemic, there was a focus on well-being that perhaps had not been there, and an appreciation and an understanding that the culture and the arts sector plays such an important part in supporting the well-being of everybody in this country and elsewhere in the world, so that is very important.

It is also a very important part of what the City of Edinburgh stands for, what Scotland stands for and indeed the UK, so the Fringe is a very important thing that happens every year and has ramifications that go well beyond sometimes what we understand. He barely has a conversation with Shona or any other member of the team without learning something new about the Fringe.

We do, of course live in very fragile economic times. The public purse is clearly, in Scotland and the UK, going to be very stretched. It does mean that we have to depend on other sources of income. He noted that Baillie Gifford were the subject of a lot of attention around the country last year and wanted to let everyone know how the Fringe Society tackled it. We treated it seriously and the Board spent a lot of time on it with a series of meetings and discussions. He made sure that every single member of the Board had the opportunity to express their views clearly. For the avoidance of doubt, there is not one person on the Board does not care about the climate challenges, that is not appalled by the loss of life in the Middle East, that does not support the right to protest, indeed from the very beginning of the Fringe's existence, it is rooted in inclusion and freedom of expression. When we took the vote, it was not a unanimous

decision that we would continue to accept funding from Baillie Gifford, but it was a strong majority of the Board that chose to do so. The Chair wanted to make sure that that was understood, and it was the right way to make a decision.

Finally, before introducing the Lord Provost, the Chair thanked the ecosystem in its broadest sense but also paid a very special vote of gratitude towards Shona and her executive team, who have done, as ever, the most extraordinary and unbelievable job. They work very hard and do that with good values and clear ambition and that is what stands behind this. There are lots of parts to the Fringe, but the Society itself is an important convening force without which the Fringe could not happen. He also thanked fellow members of the Board; we have a diverse Board of committed people with very strong opinions that are always welcome.

Introducing, the Lord Provost, Robert Aldridge, the Chair noted that he is an Ambassador for the Fringe, and the Fringe Society were thrilled to have him as an ambassador and were impressed with the zeal with which he has approached this new post.

The Lord Provost made a short speech [\[Appendix A\]](#) about the value of the Fringe to the city and his own experiences of seeing the positive work of the Fringe Society first hand.

The Chair thanked the Lord Provost for his kind words. Opening the floor to the Question and Answer session, the Chair requested people to raise a hand and introduce themselves if they had any questions.

### Open Session

**Question from Attendee** – name not captured: What was the mechanisms of hardship with the accommodation because anecdotally, a few people that have gone straight through Queen Margaret University that have got larger and cheaper accommodation than people who have gone through the Fringe Society. Quite a lot of organisations are offering it to acts and shows that go through them, and are paying quite a lot more for quite a lot less, so is there a levy on the accommodation offered or are you offering it to the third-party organisations, and they are giving a levy, or is there something weird going on there?

**Response:** Chris Snow, Head of Artist Services noted that Queen Margaret University (QMU) handle the bookings directly. The Fringe Society was not facilitating any of the organisation of it as artists are being directed to book straight through QMU and there should not be any ringfencing of rooms for third parties, it should all be artists direct.

**Comment:** That is interesting because there are a lot of third parties and QMU themselves are saying they do not know what is going on, so people who are doing it directly are getting larger rooms. QMU themselves said they are not entirely sure why other people are getting higher prices for smaller rooms. There is some communication gone wrong somewhere.

**Response:** Chris noted that it would be great to hear more about that separately, He would look into it, but from the Fringe Society's perspective, all the rooms at QMU should be ringfenced at the same price.

**Question:** Danny Worthington, Fringe Society member noted that the Fringe Society has handed out thousands of pounds in Keep it Fringe fund. The selection process is not transparent. Some big successful names in expensive venues have been given funds. Some acts awarded funds clearly had big enough budgets to buy large scale adverts. It would cost a fraction of the cost of the Keep it Fringe fund to fully fund PBH free fringe for next year, offering 400 plus shows, amongst which are disabled and neurodiverse acts, as well as the working class and Scottish acts and are much more represented than at the paid Fringe. Why has this not been considered as a strategy to generally make the Fringe more affordable for those who struggle?

**Response:** Lyndsey replied that the Keep it Fringe fund, which is now funded by the UK Government, is specifically designed to accelerate artists who have professional ambitions and the investment at whatever stage of their career they are at, whether they are emerging, first timers or looking to tour internationally. The investment is designed to give them a thing that allows them to add value to their Festival. The Fringe Society did not assess those applications, they were all assessed by independent assessors. We received 700 applications, we sent those out to 30 independent assessors; every application was assessed twice and scored, there were plenty of applicants from the Free Fringe and plenty of awards made to the Free Fringe, but it is not the Fringe Society's responsibility to do a single intervention, such as suggested by Danny. Our agreement with the UK Government to draw down the investment, is that it is exactly that; an investment in artists' careers, in order to drive their future successes, but of any feedback that people have about the specifics and the mechanisms, we worked hard to make it accessible and to make it easy to access. There were only three questions, and statistics show those who the awardees in terms of working-class, disabled artists, artists of colour, Free Fringe artists and there is quite a wide and overrepresented breakdown available on our website. Lyndsey was happy to talk to Danny in more detail and noted that all of the info and statistic on the fund could be found on the Fringe website.

**Question** – Luth Wolf, Street Performer: The next question was from a performer who commented that they have a family-friendly inclusive event. However, it was inappropriate that a major sponsor of the Street Events is an alcohol company; that creates a hostile environment for families, and it is not in line with the Fringe's commitment, which already feels like it is fuelled by alcohol. Do we need another bar in Edinburgh? Could we create a safe healthy inclusive space that is welcoming to families and young children, to enjoy the Street Events programme?

**Response:** Shona noted that the performer had spoken on a subject that was close to her heart. In an ideal world, she would love the streetscape to be sponsor-free, and that it was just street performers and the audience engaging with street performers. The reality is, it costs hundreds of thousands of pounds to keep the streets safe and to manage that space every year and without public sector intervention, we must rely on corporate support and partners. She wished it was otherwise, but she would really like to think that the wider Fringe is still very



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much a family-friendly space. She hoped that we had managed to contain those partnerships enough that it is still a family-friendly city and a family-friendly Festival. We were voted the best family experience in 2019.

**Question:** Peter Foreman, Fringe Society member asked about the COVID loan that the Fringe Society had taken out. What level is that and how are we getting on with the plans for that?

**Response:** Lyndsey replied that the loan was issued in 2020 on a ten-year term with repayment from November 2026. We have not yet begun to pay that loan back, which is partly why, as both Valerie and Shona described earlier, we will be looking at our whole business model. We have to pay that back at £200K a year from November 2026. We are working on rebuilding our reserves to be able to meet that contingent liability. Shona added that it is an interest-free loan.

**Question:** Christopher Richardson. Fringe Society member firstly apologised for last year, for being rude to the Chairman. A personal matter took him away and he could not apologise. He also wanted to thank the Fringe Society for trying to put his membership through and he tried for hours to sort it out. He asked if we could please have a simpler system for voting?

**Response:** The Chair thanked Christopher and noted that we will certainly take it to heart. Towards the end of the AGM, Shona apologised to Christopher Richardson for the difficulty he faced and made a commitment from the team collectively that that process would be simplified in line with the new website delivery.

**Question:** James Seabright, Fringe Society member, wanted to say thank you, as he did every year, to the Fringe for their wonderful work and as a producer, this year, more than most, he felt very supported by all the staff at the Fringe Society. He wanted to ask about Love the Fringe. Everyone loves the Fringe but there is a new scheme that has been operated by some of the venues, a different version of Friends of the Fringe scheme, and he wondered what the Fringe Society's plans are for Friends of the Fringe scheme going forwards. What are the challenges as a producer, in considering opting into it, the discount on tickets it involves always sees a big reduction in income, so fewer major shows are involved in it now, compared to some years back, so he wondered, in the context of Love the Fringe, what the outlook is for Friends of the Fringe.

**Response:** Lyndsey commented that the venues are perfectly entitled to set up new ticketing initiatives and it is always interesting to see how these operate. The wider conversation around offers and deals and resident discounts etc, is something that Jane Colton, Head of Box Office and Technology is taking forward with our venue box office working group and then through the producers group. It is tied into us getting a new website, so there is bigger work to do there, but specifically on the Fringe Friends, around 40% of the Fringe programme is in the Fringe Friends, and they are very loyal. Last year they bought £80,000 worth of tickets in the scheme, and another £1Mn worth not in the scheme so they are enormous consumers who enjoy discovering something new, which for the more emerging Fringe performer, there is a real

opportunity there, but we are fundamentally reviewing what will those different things mean, and who benefits and who pays the price for that ticket.

We are always keen to make sure that the artist who ultimately takes the risk to bring their work to this Festival is getting paid for as many tickets as possible, and that we are selling as many at full price and bringing in audiences. Lyndsey was interested to see what the feedback is from this year and how it worked for those of you who have been part of that, but those interested in being part of the wider conversation should speak to Jane, Chris or herself through the producers' network.

**Question:** Christopher Richardson commented that it is the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and not the Edinburgh Fringe and I think that is rather important because the festival has to exist for there to be a Fringe. Christopher also asked how much is the new hub going to cost us all? What are the running costs of this new building?

**Response:** Lyndsey noted that there will be more details in the autumn around the development, but we currently run across three separate buildings which, as you can imagine, is incredibly inefficient and incredibly expensive so the current modelling of the operational costs of that new building are that they will be slightly less than our current running costs. We have obviously got tenants, but we are also building a model for that building that does not rely on the income that we generate from the space that will be for hire, so it should not cost us more; it should actually be marginally cheaper because it is much more efficient to be in one place, rather than three places.

**Question:** Christopher Richardson asked if we would see that in the accounts?

**Response:** Not in these accounts and probably not next year's but it will be in some of our public communications about the future of that building. We have had quite a lot of consultation with Edinburgh's performing arts community because that is ultimately who some of those additional spaces are for. We want to be transparent about the whole process because there is a lot of interest in it, but also our intention with it is that it is of value to the city, to the Fringe, to Edinburgh's artists, and to the people in this room. Lyndsey offered to talk to Christopher at any point about the ambitions for that project.

**Question:** Richard Williamson, Fringe Society member asked about stages on the Royal Mile particularly and generally around Edinburgh which seem to have disappeared. They used to be a great way for young companies to get seen and it was a big part of the Fringe for student companies to perform on those free stages. Have they gone? A lot of street performances seem to be managed elsewhere.

**Response:** Lyndsey noted that pre-COVID, the stages were on the Royal Mile. Post-COVID, the changes to public safety demands means we cannot put them in the middle of the Royal Mile because they are not movable, so we moved them down to The Mound, which was not successful as artists simply did not show up. It is also increasingly challenging to find spaces for the street performers, and the street performers are an incredibly vital part of this Festival,

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they are as much a part of this community as any other artist. So, in the balance of resource and space, the taster stages, with over 50% no-shows each day, were removed. It is a complicated jigsaw puzzle, and it would be great to put them back on the Mile but there just is not the room, and we are really pushed at the edges for where there is space for everybody to perform and to flyer and for people to go about their business, go to work, go to the office, etc. It is largely a pragmatic decision that they were not being used very well by the artists who were booked to use them. But there is still plenty of pop-up performance on the Mile of Fringe performers as well who are doing things alongside the street performers and there is always a finale show on The Mound every day to enable the showcasing of that larger outdoor work.

**Comment:** Bridget Stephens, Fringe Society member thanked Shona for her very interesting report. One thing she did not mention, or if she did, Bridget missed it, was that there are several smallish awards made by groups that have nothing to do with the Fringe Society. They are not high profile, prestigious, or Fringe First, but an example she was involved with is called the Asian Arts Awards and they select performances from the Fringe programme that have some connection with Asia. We have a panel of judges, who are just ordinary punters, and we come to decisions about who will get the award (we try to avoid the word prize), but in various categories. There is no money attached to the awards but the performers who win them are gracious enough to say it means quite a lot to them to get these awards, and she knew for certain that there are other awards being made around the place. It may be that the Fringe Society office does not hear about them, but she thought people might be interested to know that.

**Response:** Susan Russell, Head of Communications, Marketing and Sponsorship noted this feedback. We have a page on the EdFringe website that lists lots of awards so if you can send us the information, we are happy to put it up there. Lots of them do not come with monetary awards so it is great to shout about them, and then the team will promote them through our social media channels so feel free to send them in, because it is great news to share with the wider community as well.

**Question:** Marlene Zwickler, Fringe Society member noted that people are setting up awards that they are marketing heavily as pick of the festival and it is damaging the artists who are not seen before the short-lists are announced, particularly in her field, which was comedy. The claims are always, see the best comedy, so when they are announcing their short-lists, or their long-lists, at the end of week two and there are artists who have yet to be seen, or have not started their run, there is a perception by the punters that when somebody claims to have seen every show, has judged them all, that they have actually done that. Is there a way that we could encourage people to just temper their wording of these things.

They are very welcome to do this, they can be private individuals, they can be media, but I have personally seen people and have asked why certain acts were excluded from being considered, and it could not just be the handful of people she had come across. We need to be responsible with how we claim things are the best, and we can properly lead by example, and just be a little bit sensitive to that.

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**Response:** Shona noted that it was one of those ones that everybody was going to have a personal view on, and it would be very difficult for the Fringe Society to police that in any way. But her point was taken.

**Comment:** Ged Welch, Fringe Society member, Best Friend, resident and other things had a suggestion. The Futures Institute has done a great job of declaring itself a public space, transformational for that part of the Meadows. Is there going to be a space when the hub is made, and would it not be wonderful if it was as open as it could possibly be as public space?

**Response:** Shona noted that the single biggest vision for the space was that it becomes completely publicly accessible to all our 39 community groups, all the Edinburgh artists who are prepping for the Fringe every year, visitors to the city, arts industry, media, but most importantly, local communities. One of the things we have committed to is a Changing Places toilet which will have an access fob and be available 24/7 for people who need it, so it is absolutely at the heart of the vision for this space that it is a welcoming open space. We are hoping to green parts of it at a later stage when we can afford to do that.

#### **Any other business**

There was no further business to discuss.

The Chair asked noted that if anybody had any questions they would like to ask at the end of the meeting, they were welcome to do so. He thanked everyone for taking the time to attend the Annual General Meeting. He asked everyone to not forget that this was about art and culture, and it was such an important part of our lives. Quoting Pablo Picasso "Art washes the soul of the dust of everyday life", he asked everyone to enjoy the sunshine and enjoy the Fringe.

Shona thanked Annabel and Tian, the BSL interpreters and Claire Hill, the screen to text typist.

The Chair declared the 2024 Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM closed.

### Appendix A: Lord Provost Speech

Good afternoon, everyone.

I am pleased to be with you today at the 55th AGM of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, and, as we can hear around us, the city-centre is once again, buzzing with the excitement of expectant audiences, colourful from the street performers and posters, and aromatic from the amazing myriad of menus and eateries that we have to offer.

As has been known for many years now, Edinburgh is the global hub for festivals, and the Festival Fringe is a core contributor, with an amazing 2.4m tickets issued in 2023, attracting audiences from nearly 170 countries, last year alone.

Against the backcloth of being “the world's greatest platform for creative freedom,” the Fringe inspires producers and performers of all abilities and backgrounds to share their creative energy, with audiences from home, across the UK, and from overseas.

This openness, or indeed lack of definition, to expression, is perhaps what continues to make the Fringe special and unique – it embraces creative practices of all shades and types, whilst celebrating those with vibrantly creative minds and application.

The Fringe is also important for our continuing upward economic and reputational growth, attracting producers from Scotland, across the UK, and internationally – with 58 countries represented this year, and 13 performance showcases from countries such as Ireland, Denmark, Germany and Canada.

The Society's development goals, includes a pledge to make the Fringe "a force for good in and for the city of Edinburgh". Some impressive engagement has occurred across our communities, working to both increase and improve access for those who are experiencing forms of disadvantage, such as the flagship 'Fringe Days Out' project, 'Fringe In' events, and work to increase the festival's inclusion and diversity profile.

As said earlier, it is already clear that we are heading towards one of the strongest Fringe's, with over 3,200 shows spanning a plethora of genres, including; theatre, comedy, dance, circus, music - there is indeed, a mouthwatering choice for us all.

I am also pleased that the Fringe has continued to build upon its community pledge, and I was therefore very pleased to launch 'Fringe Days Out' 2024 earlier in the year.

Cooperating with nearly 40 charities and communities across Edinburgh, breaking down barriers that may prevent groups and individuals attending and enjoying the world's leading cultural celebration, and the world's premiere Festival City.

Fringe Days Out, is a fantastic programme, providing a welcoming hand to people and communities, who may not otherwise have the opportunity to enjoy the arts – and this can only be a great thing.

# Minutes

## Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

### AGM

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The Edinburgh Fringe continues to be one of Edinburgh's greatest success stories, attracting world visitors, producers, and performers to our Capital for over 75 years. It also, always finds new and innovative ways of; opening doors, lifting curtains, opening spaces, and importantly improving opportunities and access to culture for our most vulnerable communities, on their own terms. The city has been delighted to see the investment unlocked by the Fringe Society to save one of our historic buildings in Edinburgh's old town. This year-round Fringe Central, refurbished on the two priorities of accessibility and carbon reduction, will be a valuable and unique addition to the cultural footprint of Edinburgh.

As the City's Ambassador for the Fringe, I am very pleased and proud to promote the work of the Fringe both here at home and across Edinburgh's international partnerships.

I am grateful to the Board, the staff, the partners, the investors, the venues, the producers, and the many performers, and artists, who invest their time, dedication, energy, and talent, and work so hard in making the Festival Fringe what it is, and I hope that 2024, and the years ahead, continue to build upon current success.

Thank you.

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