

Category: Show Participant**Candidate: Sam Dodgshon**

I am a 27-year-old writer, performer, producer, technician, and designer. This August I will be embarking on my 8th Edinburgh Fringe, having brought work to the festival every year since 2018.

Since first attending Fringe as an audience member in 2016, I have experienced our incredible festival from all sides - as a performer, producer, writer, (ish) award shortlisted technician, reviewer, Comedy Poster Award shortlisted designer, and schools facilitator. Outside of the festival I have extensive governance experience: serving for two years as a school governor, 4 years on the board of a conservation association, and 6 years as a founder-producer of Stolen Table, a comedy-arts collective.

I have benefitted from the existence of Fringe in so many ways. It was here where I received my first professional review, where I taught my first comedy workshop through the Fringe in Schools programme, and where year-after-year I have been able to develop work and build an audience. Edinburgh matters not just to those of us in Scotland, the UK, or Europe, but to performers across the world. But, when speaking to participants in all parts of the Fringe, you hear the same refrain: "Fringe is not what it used to be..."

Change is long overdue. Participants are facing spiralling costs, only worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Venue costs are spiralling, rents are exploding, PR is becoming an over-dominating force. A festival whose currency was once grassroots art, ambition, and determination is now driven by on profit, popularity, and corporatism. The cost of these gradual changes is only just becoming truly clear.

The Fringe Society is supposedly our voice and advocate. They have been in various turns silent, ineffective, or complicit in this degeneration of our festival. Incredibly, the vast majority of participants don't know what the Society does for them, with only a tiny fraction having considered it worth their time to join as members in 2025. For the Society (and hence the Festival) to prosper, its offer to Fringe participants needs to be clear. Advocacy, support, and collective organising are sorely needed.

This year's 93% cut to Keep It Fringe was casually dropped on participants too close to the Festival, insultingly spun as good news in a woeful press release. Changes to outdoor advertising were not communicated in advance, with participants bounced between the society and the council and left unable to plan. A society which would sooner issue press releases than communicate directly with the participants it supposedly represents has lost its way. This culture must change.

If elected, I will push for clear, honest, and open communication with Fringe participants throughout the year. The Society works for us - it should address us directly.

I will work to level the playing field for all participants - to bring an end to a culture where success is bought and sold. It is now nigh-on impossible to use the festival as a springboard without first having spent thousands of pounds of venues, press, marketing, and representation. Fringe is turning into a Ponzi scheme - sucking first-time performers into a festival where they have little to no chance of success or financial survival, at the benefit of those more established. The exploitative practices which have caused this must be brought to a swift end.

Our festival is young, diverse, and fringe-y. Increasingly it feels as if the Fringe Society's decision makers don't reflect the participants they represent. I will push to implement more stakeholder focussed decision-making across EdFringe, so that participants and performers can effect change instead of being affected by it.

With ambition, radical love, and community action we can save the Fringe. It isn't too late. We need to start today.