

# Minutes

## Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

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Fifty Third Annual General Meeting of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd

Company Number: SC046605

Scottish Charity Number: SC002995

Date: Thursday 25 August 2022 at 12pm

Venue: Zoom

### Present

Benny Higgins (Chair)

Colin Adams

Gillian Harkness

Hazel Anderson

James Mackenzie

Katy Koren

Luke Meredith

Matt Panesh

Miroslava Bronnikova

Neil Weir

Pip Utton

Tara Stapleton

Tari Lang

Toby Mitchell

### Apologies

Apphia Campbell

Fiona Davis

### Membership

Alistair Edwards

Allan Woolfe

Andy Cooper

Chris O'Neill

Dani Rae

Darren Neale

Ellen Tupman

Fiachra Fallon Verbruggen Ged Welch

Hartley Kemp

Hils Jago

Ian Ritchie

Isabel Schmier

James Seabright

Jim Hollington

Liane Ross

Madeline Champion

Mark Saltveit

Nigel Lovell

Oliver Schroeder

Pete Forman

Rachel Sanger

Sam Dodgshon

Sarah-Lousie Young

Thomas Hawtin

Walter DeForest

Allan Wilson

Andrew Anderson

Bridget Stevens

Conor McCormack

Daniel Matias Ferrer

David Jarman

Emily Davis

Heidi Vanttinen

Ian Maxtone

Invi Guro Brenna

Jade Eckhaus

James Turner

Kieran Butler

Lorraine Hoodless

Margaret Mckay

Marlene Zwickler

Nigel Lowey

Olly Rogers

Peter Buckley Hill

Rik Wolters

Sandy MacDonald

Sharon Burgess

Vin Arthey

# Minutes

## Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

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### Public

Brian Baker	Brian Ferguson
Darrell Martin	Flick Morri
Jay Handley	Jemma Rowlston
Lesley Fair	Lorraine Edwards
Mark Pentl	Mary Tobin
Mike Wade	Ramzi
Rik Wolters	Robert Peacock
Stefania Bochicchio	Stella Graham

### In attendance

Shona McCarthy (Chief Executive)  
Lyndsey Jackson (Deputy Chief Executive)  
Anne Diack (Head of External Affairs)  
Brigid Kennedy (Marketing Manager)  
Cameron Somers (Media Services Coordinator)  
Cerstin Heck (Development Officer)  
Charlotte Haley (Media Officer)  
Dominique Hughes (Operations Officer)  
Ellinor Fristorp (International Engagement Officer)  
Eve Anderson (Digital Manager)  
Hal Morrissey Gillman (Artist Support Officer)  
Helen Darling (EA to Chief Executive) (Minutes)  
Jane Colton (Box Office Manager)  
John Pettie (Business Systems Manager)  
Lija Jursins (Digital Projects Officer)  
Katrina Alexander (Media and Marketing Adviser)  
Matt Lord (Participant Projects Manager)  
Niki Boyle (Marketing and Communications Coordinator)  
Nina Nicholl (Marketing Communications Officer)  
Susan Russell (Head of Communications Maternity Cover)

### Apologies

Board members Apphia Campbell and Fiona Davis had sent their apologies.

### Preamble

Lyndsey Jackson welcomed Fringe Society members and members of the public to the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Lyndsey requested all attendees to mute themselves unless they are speaking and noted that the meeting would be recorded for the purpose of minute taking. She also requested attendees to avoid chatting or having secondary conversations in the chat section as it would make it difficult for the Board and Executive team to respond effectively to questions within that. The formal business will be led by the Chair, Benny Higgins and you will hear from the Chair and the Chief Executive, Shona McCarthy. We will also review activities of 2021 and Accounts. The formal business will be followed by an Open Question and Answer (Q&A) session. Please raise your digital hand and Susan Russell (Head of Communications

Maternity Cover) will invite you to speak. If you cannot raise your digital hand, then make yourself known in the chat section. We would prefer that people ask their questions rather than type their questions. If that is an issue, please drop a note. If anybody has any technical issues, the Fringe Society team will be able to help.

#### Notice

The Notice convening the meeting was taken as read and voting closed at 12pm.

#### Minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting

The Chair noted that the Minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting (AGM) had been circulated electronically and would be taken as read. The Minutes were proposed by Colin Adams and seconded by Tari Lang.

**Decision: The minutes of the 2021 AGM were unanimously approved. Proposed by Colin Adams and seconded by Tari Lang.**

The Chair welcomed everybody to the AGM and made the opening remarks. The Chair noted that the AGM was being held virtually as it was in 2020 and 2021. The feedback received from members in 2020 and 2021 was that it was more convenient online, easier to participate more actively and in some ways, less intimidating for people to join. We will revert to holding them in person from next year. We also wish to consider the timing. Historically, the AGM has been held during the Fringe festival assuming members were 'in town,' but we will survey members about holding this after the festival which may be more convenient to all.

We have faced huge challenges and it has been an anxious time in the run up to this year's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The outlook economically and geopolitically is bleak. We are under no illusions about the challenges we face across the ecosystem that represents the Edinburgh festival Fringe and accommodation particularly, has been a very big issue. Notwithstanding these challenges, the Fringe Community should be proud of its successes.

The Fringe Society were required to take a cautious approach to budget planning for 2022 with so many unknowns at the point of planning. The Fringe is well above the 50% baseline the Society was working to and ticket sales are progressing well. 63 countries are represented and a higher percentage of visitors are international. On a personal note, the Chair has seen a great deal of warmth and a sense that this has been the first year of a journey to recovery and a promising start overall. In terms of the environment, it would not be unrealistic to say that we are entering a period where cost of living, geopolitical tension and ongoing uncertainty will impact us all for many years, particularly those who are most vulnerable. We cannot make the problems go away but we will have to act collectively and with human decency and trust to work together as best we can to do as much as we can to make people's lives better.

#### Chief Executive's Report

Shona McCarthy, Chief Executive noted she would be addressing a number of the emerging issues upfront in her report. This year is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this phenomenal event, the first full Fringe post the global pandemic and the first of a five-year recovery phase. The lead up to the Fringe has been fraught with challenges and understandable anxiety right across the sector. As Fringe makers have taken the risk and the uncertainty of returning in a year like no other, audience patterns have changed, rail workers and refuse collectors are on strike and affordable accommodation as we all know it, is hard to come by. In spite of all that, venues are open, artists are here, and audiences are seeing shows. The collective achievement is massive and the entire Fringe community should be congratulated and celebrated on being back and live and doing everything they can to put on a show. This is not to say that there is not still a long road to recovery but the effort of 2022 is colossal and should rightly be acknowledged by all. Shona gave her personal thanks and congratulations to so many people who are on this Zoom call who played a massive role in bringing back a live festival this year. Shona was keen to work with everyone to address all the challenges going forward. A few Fringe headlines:

- There are 3,334 registered shows.
- 63 countries are represented on the stages of the Fringe.
- There are 1,332 accredited arts industry here looking for talent and for shows.
- There are 156 industries accredited through the Screen Fringe Partnership.
- We have 769 media accredited and that is increasing daily.
- The Street performers are here in force. There are 401 registered street performers with beautiful sign posting that there is a festival happening in the city and bringing huge joy to so many people. 51% are from the UK and the remaining 49% are from around the globe, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and Spain.

Shona noted that there have been many questions asked of the Fringe Society in recent months and wanted to be upfront in this meeting to address some of these:

- *Why did the Fringe Society budget at 50%?* There was no way to predict either artists or audience patterns post pandemic Fringe. The Fringe Society is a charity; it is answerable to 17 Board members and to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), the charity's regulator. We were running at a deficit with no resources and £1M loan to repay in the coming years. It was essential that we budgeted prudently and in a manner that could convince our Board that we could deliver and remain a Going Concern. We made decisions throughout the planning process based on the resources that we had at the time and using the best intelligence and data that we had, to be strategic with less money but for maximum impact.
- *Why did we favour the website development and the printed programme over the app?* The app is obviously something that has caused people real and understandable concern. We covered this very publicly already, but again, however simple anyone thinks it is to create a Fringe app, it would have taken a minimum of six months turnaround and cost approx. £200K. In December last year, we would have had to make that decision with no funding secured. We also had all the data from previous delivery that the vast majority of audiences used the website and the printed programme to

navigate the Fringe. The only responsible decision was that we would not do the app for 2022. We are making a very public commitment that there will be an app in 2023. We appreciate that this is a project that affects particularly artists who are doing non ticketed shows, and even though it represents a significant fundraising challenge, we have made the commitment.

- *Why did the printed programme launch in July when it is usually in June?* The decision to extend the registration period for the programme was agreed with the whole venue managers group back in December 2021. In a plea to have as much time as possible to register shows in the comeback year, we launched the programme in July in response to this need. This did not stop us promoting the Fringe through all of our other channels. Shows were online and being sold from February and we were actively marketing through our social channels since May 2022 as well as developing strategic partnerships to help broaden the reach of our messaging and marketing campaign.
- *Could our communications have been better?* Undoubtedly. Our communication was not what we would have wanted it to be. There are things that we got wrong. We had not fully understood the importance of the app particularly to non-ticketed shows and we did not get the communications of this right. We have been operating on a seriously depleted team, as have many of our colleagues across the Fringe family. We have been doing our best with that and it has certainly not been perfect.
- *What mechanisms do we use to engage with and listen to our various stakeholders?* There is our Board and our Sub Committees. We have a Board of 17 people, 12 of them are elected from membership of the Fringe Society, as you know and drawn directly from the Fringe community itself. The Board meets formally 5 times a year and in the last 2 years, much more often, to deal with the urgencies of our operating context that Benny had mentioned. We have 4 standing Sub Committees and on top of that, we have established Working Groups with external partners to look at specific operational challenges for example, the move to e-ticketing this year or the Fair Work and Volunteering Group that includes Equity and The Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU). We also have a number of strategic partners that we work with on important areas such as Access and Inclusion. We have a Venue Managers group which includes and is open to venue representatives from across the Fringe. During the last 2 years, this group has mostly met bi-monthly. We have a producers and promoters group, Fringe Marketplace which is our online Arts Industry platform that we engage year round with arts industries from across the world. We have Fringe Connect which now has nearly 4,000 members and that is an online membership for individual artists and participants and we provide, year round, a range of online services through that channel. We have you, our Fringe Society membership and this annual meeting. We work with many local community groups and residents' groups. We also work with policy makers, City of Edinburgh Council and stakeholders across Scottish government. We have our Friends of the Fringe, Made in Scotland and other international showcases from Ireland, Canada, Australia and across the world. There are many engagement mechanisms and we are also regularly in contact with other cultural organisations.
- *What recovery funds did the Fringe receive and how were these allocated?* Details of all the funding that has been allocated to the Fringe Society during the pandemic is in the public domain and was announced proactively and transparently. For those looking for

more detail, we do produce audited accounts, which can be found at Companies House as per our statutory obligations. For the record, and for clarity at this AGM, there were 3 significant public investments allocated to the wider Fringe throughout the Covid 19 period.

- The first of these was the form of a £1Mn loan to the Fringe Society in 2020. We are a charity whose financial model is dependent on registration fees, commission from ticket sales, sponsorships, grants and donations. The only annual core public funding that we receive is £75K annually from the City of Edinburgh Council. When the pandemic prevented the Fringe from happening in 2020, we were facing insolvency. In order to survive and meet our first priority - which was to refund all of the artists who had already paid the registration fees for that year - we had to appeal to the Scottish government for support. That support came in the form of a £1M loan of which £670K went directly to refunding artist registration fees. The remainder was spent ensuring the Charity remained a Going Concern. We have to repay the full loan over the coming years.
- Secondly, in 2021 the Scottish government established a fund called the Gateway Process to support Edinburgh's festivals. This was designed to deal with the additional requirements needed to deliver a Covid safe festival in 2021. You may recall that Covid was a live concern and restrictions on public health was still a major consideration for the event sector in 2021. The Fringe's share of this fund was £1Mn administered through Event Scotland. This was allocated to support producing venues to put Covid mitigations in place delivering a scaled back Fringe in 2021. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society did not ask for or receive any money from this fund.
- In March 2022, the Scottish government allocated additional funding through the PLaCE programme asking applicants to meet specific criteria to successfully receive money. In total 1.58M was allocated to the Fringe community. This was a significant achievement for the Fringe and it was supported by our fellow festivals in recognition of the vulnerable financial mode of the Fringe and also its importance to the cultural eco system. This time, £250K of the total fund was allocated to the Fringe Society in order to help us build back our team and our services. To address some of the huge post Covid budget gaps, a further £55K was allocated to support the management of the street events. The remaining £1.275M was allocated through an open allocation process to Fringe operators to support recovery of the Fringe this year with particular emphasis on fair employment, sustainability and inclusion. As with all public funding, the funds were allocated against the PLaCE fund criteria by a panel with representatives from Creative Scotland, Event Scotland and City of Edinburgh Council plus one independent panellist. The panel was chaired by the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society. Every application was considered and scored against the criteria in a robust and fair process. The results were announced publicly and in a press release. Reporting against the stated objectives was a key part of the funding agreement with recipients, and 15% of the funds have been withheld until final reports have been submitted. Sadly, all those who applied for this fund were not successful and we wish we could have supported everyone. We hope that

going forward as we develop our own Support the Fringe funds, we will be able to make sure that all those who need support can benefit from that, can be helped.

- *What public support does the Fringe Society receive on an annual basis?* For clarity, when the Fringe Society says we are not publicly funded we mean in the arts sector context. We are not a regularly funded organisation through Creative Scotland normally referred to as an RFO. We do receive £75K annually from the City of Edinburgh Council. We receive Expo funding through the Scottish government which is ring fenced to deliver the Made in Scotland programme. We receive PLaCE funding which is also ring fenced to deliver our arts industry, community, and learning work.
- *Why did we relocate Fringe Central at St James Quarter this year?* This was a decision again based on cost, affordability and sponsorship. St James Quarter gifted us the space rent free and also provided some sponsorship for the street events activity. In the High Street and we are very grateful for the support that we received from St James Quarter to locate Fringe Central there this August, otherwise we simply would not have been able to deliver that service this year. The Fringe Society itself has not relocated; we are still in our offices behind the shop on the Royal Mile.
- *Why did we provide accommodation for some journalists?* Through support from the University of Edinburgh, we have been able to offer one flat for August which was allocated on an enquiry basis from early March. The flat has 9 individual rooms. Journalists supported have a UK wide or international reach and support the wider editorial and feature coverage of the Fringe that is necessary to drive interest in the Fringe broadly and encourage attendance from across the UK. Going forward, we are working on criteria for how we can adapt this to an open application process. However, it firstly requires working on additional accommodation support for media. The 2022 flat, just to be clear, was not at detriment to artists. It was allocation over and above any University support offered to artists.

Shona said that those were the main questions that had come up from the Society's perspective and was sure there were many more. She hoped that she had addressed those up front. Some of the other questions she flagged were:

- *What has the Fringe Society done to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary?* Again, with depleted resources and a smaller team, we have tried to do our best working in partnerships. The BBC commissioned a 90-minute feature documentary telling the story of the Edinburgh Fringe or at least some of the story. There was a limited-edition Fringe programme and merchandise marking the anniversary. We have launched this week an online project, celebrating 75 moments of personal stories from both audience members and people who participated at the Fringe over the years. Shona urged attendees to explore that as it is a reminder of the enormous joy, history and the importance of the festival in so many people's lives. David Pollock produced a new book on the history of the festivals and that has been launched. Dave Southern, one of the street performers, ran a project called Pavementology. It is an exhibition and walking tour depicting the history of street performers, rooted in Edinburgh and the Fringe. The Fringe Society consulted widely on and launched a new vision for the Fringe with

serious and ambitious goals going forward to ensure the long term future success and relevance of the Fringe.

Coming back to some of this year's highlights, we do not have a final overview yet of the media reach, but it looks exceptional. The internationalism is one of the things that should bring us all joy. To have 63 countries represented on the stage in the year post pandemic is no small thing. Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales were very strongly represented in the festival, as always. We have showcases from 15 countries and the continued effort and commitment to access is evident, including the first ever Deaf festival within the Fringe run by Deaf Action. The street events are stripped back to their core values and we have developed a street performer charter, having worked closely with street performers to agree shared principles. It has been a really positive experience this year and we have received enormously positive feedback. The shift to e-ticketing has been part of our journey to reduce print and overall, is a real success and we can continue to improve and develop this going forward.

- In spite of the government funding not addressing everyone's needs, it is important to acknowledge that the Edinburgh Fringe got the lion's share of funding available and we owe a debt of gratitude to the Scottish Government for making this money available.
- Phoebe Waller-Bridge, our honorary President has been very visible and supportive in her role as President of our Society. We added Eddie Izzard as our first public Patron who again has been visible in her presence in the city. We intend to grow that alumni patronage and to have a wider representation of what makes up the wonders of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.
- For 15 years, we have frozen the registration fees. We have committed to do that for a further 5 years.
- There are really big issues that we are taking forward this year already and we will hear more at this AGM. One of the biggest issues is affordable accommodation in Edinburgh. It is something that we heard loudly and clearly this year. The Lord Provost, Robert Aldridge, amongst others have agreed to lead that charge going forward. The Fringe Society was able to source 1,200 rooms capped at £280 per week. While this helps, it only scratches the surface. We need use our convening role to work with the city, our partners and the universities to explore where further solutions can be sourced. The cost of living, affordability, staffing challenges are major issues for the Fringe. The Fringe Society team are committed to helping in any way we can, and want to work with everyone to try to make this festival inclusive, welcoming and one that can grow in recovery in the next years.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for a comprehensive update and invited Lyndsey Jackson, Deputy Chief Executive to provide a review of 2021.

Lyndsey noted that the Fringe Society publish an Annual Report every year which is a review of the year and that is available online on [edfringe.com](http://edfringe.com). It provides specific details on what we did in 2021 and Lyndsey urged everyone to read this for more detailed insight. Primarily, planning for 2021, eighteen months ago, was done in the context of a still live pandemic and Covid environment. We were still in partial lockdown, and only at the beginnings of vaccine programmes for the elderly or those at risk. The general public was unvaccinated as we went into the summer. All of our early planning in 2021 assumed that 2021 could be a digital only



festival. Therefore, we focused on delivery of digital presentation. Then, in the late spring, in-person delivery became a likelihood and we pivoted in order to ensure that we could support a hybrid festival for both live and online events. Alongside all of that, we continued to lobby for support and Shona has provided the details of funding we received. It was largely about mitigating against Covid and getting people back out in the city.

Over 900 shows registered, 60% of which are in person and audiences, particularly from Edinburgh and they were incredibly enthusiastic and keen. Huge respect is due to the companies that took the risk to join us last year and the collective effort to get Fringe 2021 over the line. There were lots of thoughtful and creative ideas about how to do the Fringe in a Covid safe environment. Alongside that, we continued the work that we started in 2020 for the provision of year round services for artists, industry and media with online platforms, Fringe Connect and Marketplace. They were always in our plan and Covid in many ways accelerated plans. We were fortunate to get some investment from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support the Marketplace development which is about how an international industry can engage with the Fringe.

We continued to work with all our partners, artists, in particular our communities as much as we could, as well as local authorities. We were mindful of the impact of Covid on marginalised groups that might be at greater risk of harm and who are part of our Fringe Days Out scheme (for community groups across Edinburgh). We were able to activate small elements of Fringe engagement. Thanks to our street performers who are local, we were able to take them out to the groups, to children's hospitals, to activate community spaces in order to give people a taste of the Fringe. Those are the key highlights of 2021's activities. Lyndsey urged everyone to read the Annual Review.

#### **Accounts**

Lyndsey provided an update on the accounts in the absence of the Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee (FAR) Fiona Davis. An email was sent to members pointing to the accounts in the members area. 2021, as articulated by Shona, was a challenging year for the Fringe Society financially and we had to work very hard to ensure that our very limited resources were best placed in what was a changeable and unknown environment. In 2021, the Fringe Society ended the financial year with an operational deficit of £450K. It was slightly better than we had planned. Within the year end audit process funds that were restricted for projects, largely DCMS money and some additional project funding that had key delivery areas in 2022, were requested by the auditors to be acknowledged within the 2021 financial year. What this means in practice is that the accounts presented today reflect a roughly breakeven position rather than a deficit of £450K. It also means that in 2022's accounts with our current budget running at a similar deficit, we will likely present an enormous £900K deficit. There is an accounting practice where funds are transferred over the year end which means our year end position for 2021 is healthier than it was and our year end position in 2022 will look worse. We were able to secure new funding from DCMS, Creative Scotland, British Council, additional funding from City Council, Event Scotland, Trusts and Foundations including the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. These were largely for key delivery areas such as street events, Arts Industry or artist support. We were also able to activate some sponsor revenue and some funding to reactivate street

events in 2021 which was still a restricted event when we started but we were able to go ahead without any Covid restriction after week one which made it easier to manage for the team.

As in any other year, the key costs for the Fringe Society have not changed dramatically. We are a service organisation charity, our costs are largely our staff, technology, systems, service delivery cost and any project delivery expenditure, which is all clearly outlined in the accounts. In 2021, we contracted in size as an organisation; this was largely because of roles not being replaced by leavers, roles not being filled or new roles being put on hold in order to save revenue. To give a snapshot of that, in January 2021, the Fringe Society had just over 20 full time equivalent employees compared to 35 in the same period in 2020. The Fringe Society Board signed off an emergency ongoing budget at the year-end in the context of the uncertainty over Covid, funding for the year, the sector's ability to return to the Fringe, material uncertainty around the cost of living, and the impact of geopolitical issues, such as the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The Board were in a position to sign off quite a prudent budget and members can read more about that at the end of the Directors Report. Lyndsey was happy to answer questions but her overwhelming encouragement was to read the Directors Report as there were lots of details in the audited accounts. Lyndsey was also happy to talk to members about the Fringe accounts.

#### *End of Formal Business*

The Chair made a few comments before opening the Question and Answer session to ensure members understood how to ask questions. In order to cover as much ground as possible the Chair requested those asking questions or making comments to be as brief as possible and those replying would be expected to do the same. Follow up questions are welcome but when we have exhausted the answer, we will not go back to the same question. People asking questions and answering them must show due respect and we will do our best to cover as much ground as possible. The Chair opened the Question and Answer session.

#### **Open Session**

**Question:** Nigel Lovell asked the Board to propose a vote of no confidence in the Chief Executive and the senior management of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society. The reasons for this are in March 2020, the Fringe Society said it would not offer refunds to participants who cancelled shows due to Covid or if the venues cancelled the shows. The Fringe Society was putting its own income in front of the health and wellbeing of participants, venue staff and general public. This is not acceptable. The Fringe Society flatly refused to extend the early bird deadline of 11 March despite all the uncertainty about the pandemic saying that there was no clear rationale for any changes to planning and operations. This was despite having been urged to extend deadlines by acts, promoters, venues and Equity. Large gatherings were made illegal four days later and the whole country went into lockdown less than two weeks after the Fringe had taken all the early bird registration fees. As late as 17 March, the Fringe Society were saying

it was business as normal even when the whole Fringe was cancelled. As participants, we were refused refunds and told our registration fees would just be rolled over to 2021. When we were finally promised refunds, it took a long time for these to be processed at a time when performers had lost all their income. The handling of the pandemic by the senior management at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society was appalling. Senior management have also opened the Society to catastrophic losses by not providing an App this year. It is fine to say we are going to provide one in 2023 but participants in 2022 submitted their registration fees with the provision that there would be app. It was an implied term in the contract. Because there is no app, there has been a breach of contract. The situation that the Fringe Society has acknowledged by offering some artist refunds for their registration fees. The fact that there is a breach in contract will result in many participants taking legal action for breach of contract and claiming damages for loss of earnings. If these claims are successful, implications for the Fringe Society will be devastating. The tone deaf way in which the Fringe Society has responded saying the app is not an issue to participants is a disgrace. This has to lie with the CEO and the senior management and that is why I propose a vote of no confidence.

**Response:** The Chair responded that Nigel's comments were noted and he would ask Lyndsey to respond on some of the points of detail. He did not think that anybody had suggested that the artist did not matter. We were faced with very tough choices and we made choices. We have already acknowledged that some of the communication could have been better but as far as Shona's position is concerned, he assured that as Chair and part of the collective Board, she had their full confidence. She has done an excellent job in the most difficult circumstances. It does not mean that things have not gone wrong. That will never be the case. We have been in almost unprecedented times of challenge. He asked Lyndsey to respond to the details raised in the question.

Lyndsey noted that that was 2 years ago and we would have welcomed these enquiries at last year's AGM. She appreciated that things have been quite stressful. At the time, the Fringe Society was acting on advice that had been given by the government and stakeholders. We were also operating in an environment where the festivals were looking to make a collective announcement in 2020. As soon as the announcement that the festival was not going ahead was made, we immediately moved to refund registration fees. It was the right and obvious thing to do. It took us some time to secure the funds from the government to make the Fringe Society itself solvent, we did work through those refunds as quickly as we could in the context of having to immediately furlough most of the team in order to again keep the Fringe Society solvent. Lyndsey appreciated that finances were difficult for many individual artists but assured that the team had worked 6-7 days a week in order to get through the backlog; by that point around 1800 shows that had registered. It was purely an administrative task that took us some time and apologised if that caused anybody any issues in their personal finances. We were working in incredibly challenging circumstances. On the app and breach of contract, she noted that members are not asked to approve the accounts. The auditors make a report to the Board and the Board sign off those accounts. The board have had extensive discussion around the Going Concern. The Fringe Society is not in breach of contract. We have taken some legal advice on that and have had that conversation with the auditors who have given their opinion on Going Concern and have also given their Going Concern opinion with a level of material uncertainty for next year. We have had a very detailed audit review and the Board and the

Finance Committee have had a chance to review and do not believe that those concerns are founded.

Benny thanked Lyndsey and noted that the meeting had to move on. Nigel commented that Lyndsey had said that registration fees were immediately offered as refunds when the Society knew the Fringe was not going ahead. That was not true. The participants were able to roll over their fees to the following year. We were not offered refunds until the very last moment. Refunds were offered to customers before they were offered to participants. Lyndsey replied that every single participant was offered the option of the refund rolling over to the next year which was particularly relevant to international artists that would pay large bank processing fees. Audiences were given the option to donate their ticket revenue to the artist for whom they held a ticket. Lyndsey said she would need to check the timeline but the Fringe Society certainly did not prioritise or preference in our messaging that the fees should be rolled over. People were asking us for both realities so we offered both simultaneously. Lyndsey said she would check with the team but did not agree with Nigel that that was the reality of what happened but without being able to go back and look at that timetable and the correspondence that we sent, she was unable to answer and could follow up after the meeting.

**Question:** Liane Ross commented that she had forwarded the question in the main chat section of Zoom. Benny asked Shona to take a few minutes to read the question – below.

*“Why no funding from the Scottish government was allocated to PBH Free Fringe and The Stand, the only organisations that offer performers and venues for free. Half of the nominees for neurodiverse comedy awards are PBH. How does the Fringe Society plan to tell the Scottish government that they allocated money away from venues that effectively support neurodiverse HUMAN BEINGS! How many reviews of free shows have been published by the national press thanks to your initiatives (I believe none) which means that we are discriminated against by the Fringe Society and underrepresented in society as a knock on effect. This year the most vulnerable and voices that need to be heard oppressed. How can you justify calling this a charity? We are hearing a string of excuses and were given no say or equal footing across the festival. The damage has already been done. We were not expecting a sensible answer, but I am screen shotting this so it does not get conveniently deleted and can be used to confirm a reaction of indifference.”*

**Response:**

Shona had poor eyesight and struggled to read the full length of the question which was put in chat text. She sought to check if the question was primarily why there was no funding awarded specifically to the PBH Free Fringe? Liane replied that there was quite a lot of points. A lot of people who are neurodiverse need a free venue and that is underrepresented. A huge number in the free Fringe have not had exposure or any funding whatsoever when they are the ones that needed the funding the most and there were more questions in the chat message. Shona noted that she was visually challenged herself and was trying to go through it quickly. She responded that the main question posed by Liane was why the PBH Free Fringe and The Stand did not get funding from the venue fund. It was an open application process and every single application scored against the criteria that was set. She wished that everyone had been able to receive support. Liane interrupted at this point and asked if there was something wrong with the Fringe Society’s criteria that it was set up in a discriminatory way? It was

disproportionate and people who did not have any money to start with, have not received any money. Shona commented that she did not have anything more to say on this and Liane interrupted to say that she was honestly not expecting Shona to have a reply but just wanted to put it out there so everyone knew what was going on. Shona pointed out that Laughing Horse free Fringe and Bob's Blundabus did get support. Liane interrupted again and asked why PBH and The Stand did not get support and that was not fair. Shona responded that that was a question for the panel who scored against each criteria point. The money came from PLaCE which comes with a set of criteria. Liane tried to interrupt again but Shona pointed out that she was responding to her question. Continuing, Shona noted that it is the way with public funding that it comes with a set of criteria. It was fairly scored and went through the appropriate process. She would have loved to see everybody supported. Liane interjected saying that it felt that the way it as set up was institutionally wrong. So how are locals to enjoy the Fringe for years to come if there are only ticketed places that are being supported and will survive. It will mean that the Fringe is something that comes here, makes money and leaves. It is not a part of the community. It is disappointing but you can move on as I have made my point.

**Question:** Andrew Anderson asked about the cancellation of the second night of the Jerry Sadowitz performance about which as far as he knew, the Fringe Society had nothing to say. Was that right and if it had not said anything, why not?

**Response:** Shona replied that the Jerry Sadowitz decision was a decision taken by one venue at the Fringe as it had its own criteria and entitlement to make decisions; the Fringe Society did not interfere with their decision. It is not for us to do so. Andrew asked whether the Fringe Society had no view when a venue or impresario decides to cancel a show, which is entirely up to them? Shona replied that if the entire Fringe were to cancel a show, then that might be a different issue but Jerry Sadowitz was free to be programmed in other venues or other spaces. It is not a barring from the Fringe but it is up to any individual venue to make their own programming decisions and choices. We do not interfere. Andrew asked if that meant that the Fringe Society does not stand up for freedom of speech? Shona responded that that was not the case and she did not have any further comment on this.

Benny commented that the Society did stand up for freedom of expression and freedom of speech and Andrew's question had been answered. The Fringe was still available to Jerry Sadowitz through other venues. He requested the meeting to move on. Andrew then asked whether the Fringe Society was saying that because another venue could have put up this performance and none did because it was a hypothetical possibility, the reality of which we cannot assess, then it is somehow alright for it to be cancelled? Benny replied that he did not say it was alright but that the Fringe Society does not interfere with a single venue's decision. Andrew asked again if the Fringe Society had no view whatsoever? Shona replied there was nothing further to say.

**Question:** Robert Peacock commented that in 2019 at the Comedy Awards speech, Nica Burns raised the prospect of having a media summit to discuss the future of the Fringe media coverage. This was supposed to happen in the autumn of 2019 but it did not happen. There were organisations like his that are Edinburgh based who are here every single year. They were here in 2020 reviewing a project and were in here in 2021 when very few other media organisations were present. They were very supportive of Meet the Media, meet individual

performers, are active on social media and help performers. They heard today from some of the free Fringe performers who were disappointed with media coverage as they do not get the coverage they deserve. We are one of the organisations that try to serve the entire Fringe and not just the Pleasance Courtyard (for example). They also heard today that there were a number of publications that were provided accommodation so they could attend. We do not need accommodation but we are very supportive of what the entirety of the Fringe do. He wanted to know what was going to be done going forward in 2023 to ensure it is a fair playing field where organisations like his who do a lot of good work and were committed to the Fringe's values.

**Response:** Susan thanked Robert for his question and was grateful for the support extended to performers this August and the years gone by. She invited Robert to have a conversation on how to take his request forward in 2023 and offered to follow up with him after the AGM.

**Question:** Rik Wolters commented on a follow up point on the question of the funding that was handed out. How were the criteria that it was based on, not made available for everyone to see?

**Response:** Shona responded that the criteria was widely shared with eligible organisations. Lyndsey clarified that there were 19 applications worth approx. £1.98M and there was a clearly stated application process. There were more than 2 applications that were not successful. It was a competitive process with 19 applications and 13 awards were made in total. Rik commented that it should have been out in the open - how it was scored and the reasons for giving an organisation the fund. It does not look great that 2 performer led organisations did not receive any funds. A lot of people are asking questions on why they were missed off. Lyndsey replied that detailed feedback on the panel outcome was provided to both organisations as to why funding was not awarded in the competitive process but it would not be fair to show those here. The Fringe Society has been having those conversations directly with those organisations.

**Question:** Referring back to the funding panel, Jemma Rowston asked if there was a possibility for them to arrange a question section or for the Fringe Society to issue a proper statement to learn more about the funding criteria and understand how we as organisations and also as artists can support organisations like the PBH Fringe to be in a better place to be able to receive funding.

**Response:** Benny thanked Jemma and noted that it was a legitimate question to try and understand it better and modify it to make it more accessible.

**Question:** Lorraine Hoodless's query was related to the promotion and to the customer or audience experience. She had spoken to many people in different organisations about their frustrations with the audience experience. We need to put that on the table if we are to have a sustainable Fringe. The audience members have expressed confusion over many different websites, apps, booklets that are produced and on street marketing that is all over the place during the Fringe festival. If we want to maintain our audience, we should be putting them at the heart of what we are trying to achieve and think about the customer experience route to either purchasing tickets, reserving tickets or understanding the free Fringe structures and how they can access all the different shows. If we put the customer and the audience at the heart of this, then we should be looking at a more combined approach across different organisations

and stop the additional promotion that goes on. Lorraine wanted to raise this as something that could be explored perhaps with a focus group of people that attend the Fringe in whatever capacity to understand their route to purchasing, how complicated it is with several different registrations on different sites to gain kits and the different ways in which they present their tickets (digitally, paper or just pitching up). To secure our audience for the future, we could make it easier for people across the board to access tickets. That would mean that we need to all work together and own this.

**Response:** Lyndsey noted that what had been raised was a question for the Fringe in its entirety rather than the Fringe Society because there are obviously individual and competitor organisations but ultimately anything that gets audiences into shows as quickly, seamlessly and easily as possible is in our collective interest. We will take that to the Venue Managers working group in the first instance. Lyndsey thanked Lorraine for raising this.

**Question:** Stella Graham's question related to the partial refund or rather lack of. She is an act with PBH. She registered from the beginning to be part of the Fringe as she has done in the past. With their being no app and this has been spoken about at length, when she complained she was offered a full refund but as part of that as she recalled in an email she was told that she could have a full refund but she would be taken off the website and withdraw all the services, etc. That was not what she wanted as an act. It was a horrible way to handle it because there is some value. She was in the brochure and the website but the lack of an app as a free Fringe act hurt many of the acts. Audiences tend to make use of the Shows Nearby Now function. Even she used it as an audience member. There is an option on the website to find Shows Nearby Now but that does depend on using data whereas the app was that much more efficient. She was looking for some form of partial refund and felt she had not been given the same amount of service from the Fringe Society with having that app missing. She did not want a full refund and could not understand the decision to rule out a partial refund.

**Response:** Shona replied that the whole idea that the registration fee covers all of the services has never sat comfortably with her. We have frozen fees for the last 15 years and committed to another 5 years. The app actually only existed for 4 years of that. Shona commented that she could only apologise that we could not afford to do that this year. She really heard what had been said particularly the voices of the free Fringe community. It was her priority going forward. We did get that wrong and did not realise just how dearly it was held with people like yourself. She had already apologised many times for this and apologised again.

Lyndsey commented that the reason why there was no partial refund was that the app was one element of the services so it would be impossible to put a value on that. Also, the income from registration only partially covers the cost of the core services that we deliver to artists during the festival. So that would have been at detriment to various services that were already under pressure. Replying to that, Stella said that it was tone deaf because there was a huge value in having the app. If you had sent out a survey, to all the participants, and anyone who had taken part in the Fringe and paid their registration to be in the brochure would have told you. Something simple like a Survey Monkey with questions such as "How do you feel about there not being an app? How much do you value an app?" would have got all the answers then.

Benny appreciated the point that Stella was making but back in December 2021 we were in difficult circumstances and faced a lot of uncertainty. The hardest thing about management is

making difficult choices. There is no more we can say on how we got there but we acknowledge that there was a communication issue.

Stella asked if the Society was able to offer a full refund and the Fringe Society had heard from many of the performers about the problems with the lack of an app. Surely, the Society could calculate the value of an app and transfer that to a partial refund to those that had really missed out this year. Lyndsey replied we did do a survey and the majority of the people said that they use the web more than the app. Of course, that is a survey of people that actively participate but the challenge we have with the Fringe Society is that the performers that we have are largely individuals and disparate; some are new to festivals and some have been with the festival for 25-30 years and do not engage with our correspondence. We did send a survey and evidently lots of people are not on that list. What we really need to do in the Fringe Society is to find a better way to communicate with returning artists and individual artists particularly those of you who are not in the larger venues, where the communications are managed by the venues. It was not for the want of trying. We did ask some of these questions to get that feedback but that is of its nature a selected group. The biggest thing you could do to help this conversation collectively as artists and as members is to actually sign up to those mailing lists and make sure that we are talking to you and your views are heard.

Benny noted that there was a question in the chat about the process of approving the accounts. He asked Gillian Harkness, Board member to take this section forward. Gillian introduced herself and noted that in her day job, she was a solicitor and advised charities and third sector organisations. On the question of Accounts, the requirement under Companies Act is for members to receive a copy of the Accounts. The law changed with the Companies Act 2006. As a procedural point, it is no longer a requirement for members to approve the Accounts. Benny thanked Gillian for her advice.

**Question:** Darrell Martin commented that he had joined the meeting late and heard negativity at the meeting. Despite coming out of the pandemic, we have a cost of living crisis, there has been a staff crisis and train strikes. He asked if we should not be quite pleased that the festival has gone ahead? It was never going to be like 2019, at least we have had it. Did everybody not think we should be quite happy that it has happened again? Everyone should not be quite so negative. He asked what could be done to address the accommodation issue? The problem for most acts and most audiences is the ridiculous cost of accommodation caused by the government's decision to change contracts and that is the main pressing issue for future of this festival. Is there anything being done?

**Response:** Benny welcomed Darrell's comments. It was inevitable that when there are things that need to be talked about and dealt with, there can be sometimes undue focus on them but they need to be aired and discussed. In the most extraordinary circumstances, in the first year of the 5 year recovery process, this year has been a success by any standards albeit not without some failures, but an overall success. Benny had addressed issues at the start including that of accommodation and the environment. Things will get worse before they get better. Shona flagged to Darrell that we had noted earlier that accommodation was one of the biggest single issues that we are convening stakeholders around, to seek solutions with immediate effect. We have been talking to everyone from the Members of Parliament to the Lord Provost who has given us his public commitment to lead on this agenda. It is a tricky one because the



legislation that had been brought in around short term lets is there to back local citizens and to legitimately protect Edinburgh residents from not having their properties bought and given over to Airbnb. We could probably have more traction on the student lets in terms of some sort of relaxation. We are talking to the universities as well. We have a taskforce around this going forward to take it on as one of the major barriers to inclusion in the Fringe. Anne Diack, Head of External Affairs commented that we have been involving our political leaders constantly. This is a real big issue for the Fringe and there is a challenge here for residents trying to find accommodation and Scotland is also receiving around 20,000 refugees. Rest assured we are doing absolutely everything in our power to ensure that Fringe artists are being heard and seeking solutions to ensure artists are not suffering as a result of this. Darrell expressed his concern that come January or February next year and if there are no reasonable flats for rent being advertised, people will decide not to come because it is the biggest barrier. Regular audience members have not been able to afford to come this year and he also had 10 shows cancelled because of accommodation costs. If this is not resolved quickly, it will be the slow death and shrinkage of the Fringe. Agreeing with Darrell, Benny commented that generally the cost of living is an issue but accommodation is a serious threat to discouraging performers, audience and customers coming in 2023. It does not present as a problem that can be easily resolved but that does not mean we do not do our best.

**Question:** Sandy MacDonald said that as an Edinburgh resident who has been attending the Fringe since 1974, he congratulated the Fringe Society for putting on an excellent show in the month of August. It could not have been easy considering what we have all come through. He asked for an improvement in e-ticketing. He booked shows many times and had to secondary book for friends that wanted to attend shows with him and ended with lots of e-tickets that he had to print to keep up with it. Would it be possible that when you book under your login, all your tickets could go on to the one e-ticket?

**Response:** Lyndsey thanked Sandy for his feedback. She acknowledged that it was not perfect but given that it was only launched this year, it was quite successful. It is an interesting idea and we will have to think through what that means if you wanted to share your ticket, then you are giving somebody the QR code for your whole booking. We have a partial wallet functionality online on Mytickets in edfringe.com which works really well on your mobile. There is work to do on the audience ticketing experience, time and money notwithstanding. We will be doing an audience survey and there will be questions about your e-ticket experience but that is great feedback.

**Question:** Ramzi commented that it was a follow up question to the app. Is the Fringe Society going to take the existing app and tune it up for next year? Some people are asking why it cost so much. Are you going to build and therefore is it going to cost more than £200K? In his experience, he was sick of seeing Gateway timed out when he accessed Mytickets in the application because he had around 150-200 tickets in there and maybe that is part of the problem. It needs to be an app and the app needs to be searchable by 15 minute intervals. He asked what were the actual plans for the app and will it be in the Cloud?

**Response:** Lyndsey replied that the reason it was such a long process and would have cost so much money was because the old apps were native Apple and Android which means they live on the handset and the data sits there. The cost of updating them in a normal year is quite significant. We intend to move to a more agile cloud based space to make it much lighter,

easier and cheaper in future to update. We have not worked out the full costings for that but given the complexity of our ticketing network, it will be in excess of £100K. When it came to turning back our 2019 apps, the development that would be needed and changes in the operating system, the complete fundamental redesign payment card processing to comply with 3D Secure version 2 meant that the cost and timescales would be very high. What we had were apps built in 2016-2017 that were pretty much redundant. We will not be reviving the old but building new, agile and as future proof as possible. Lyndsey welcomed ideas and feedback. Ramzi asked if there was any chance of getting the QR code so that they can just be loaded into an Apple or Android wallet? Lyndsey replied that it was on the list of functionality.

Benny drew attention to a question on the vote of no confidence that had been asked earlier and he wanted to respond in an open and transparent way. He invited Gillian to speak about the process and how that would work. Shona and the executive team left the room at this point.

Gillian advised that this was a matter for the board of directors and explained the principles of company law in relation to directions by members, special resolution requirements, etc. Benny had previously advised that Shona had the full confidence of the board and Gillian, therefore, indicated that this was not valid business for this meeting and discussion on this point was closed.

Benny noted that Nigel had another question but he wanted to get around as many people as he could and requested Nigel to be as quick as possible.

**Question:** Nigel Lovell referred to the app. Shona had repeatedly said that she did not realise how important it was but if you look at the annual Accounts for the Fringe over the last few years, there is a risk statement and one of the risks is the loss of the app and what that would mean. You can see from that risk statement how important it has been. For people to just say we did not realise is no excuse. It should not be allowed to pass; people should be held to account. When we are hearing, all we can do is apologise, we think that is not all the Fringe Society can do. You can offer a partial refund. You have not been listening to us as participants. Our union Equity has asked you for a partial refund. When the Fringe Society is not listening to participants, do you not think that it is doing possibly its most important job, wrong?

**Response:** Benny replied that the Fringe Society does listen carefully to participants. Secondly, there is no more to say on this particular issue. We made a difficult choice and we have covered it in as many versions as we can. We will move on recognising that you and others are disappointed and concerned about it. Nigel repeated that the Fringe Society can offer a partial refund. Benny noted that this had already been discussed.

**Question:** James Seabright thanked the Society for taking his question. He was a member of the Fringe Society and a producer. He had been bringing shows as a student and a professional for 20 years to the Fringe. He missed it greatly in 2020 and he appreciated bringing work back last year in the small scale Fringe and again this year. He thanked the Board, Shona and her team for all they have done in that very difficult period. Personally, he felt very supported as he had been communicating with the Fringe team and had found them very responsive. It is disappointing to hear that some participants did not share that experience. There is a lot to

celebrate this year and there was a lot to celebrate last year because of the Fringe coming back getting bigger and better. The emphasis of this meeting on certain issues is regrettable because there is so much to celebrate. One of the things it does draw out is the number of people in the meeting today, 80 people is a record in terms of AGM attendance. It is great to see so many people engaging with the Fringe Society and its work. He asked what plans the Society has to look at improving the interaction of the participant base with the Society other times of the year outside of the AGM so that concerns around communication and process may be better resolved on an ongoing basis.

**Response:** Benny thanked James for his opening remarks. Lyndsey commented that they have begun this conversation internally. We want to change this idea of one size fits all because it is really clear that it does not. It is about increasing the capacity of the team and how we use the year round services in Fringe Central. We have a new senior manager, Chris Snow who is filling an empty post and joins in September as Head of Artist Services. We are hopeful that he comes in with new ideas and a new perspective on it all. We will be hosting open forums, which we already do, and look at how we can better communicate in this space and across the UK and potentially return to live shows. We have certainly acknowledged in recent months that the conversation is missing in places and Sarah Dodd, who is our Arts Industry Manager has a specific interest in comedy. We would be happy to join anybody in an open conversation about the Fringe. We are meeting with the Live Comedy Association (LCA) this afternoon in order to pick up some of the things in their open letter. There is a more structured response coming in September but there is always an open invitation to come and talk to us or ask questions.

**Question:** Susan referred to a question in the chat posed by Invi Guro Brenna. Why was there a mental health first-aider present only till 19 August? Could the money not cover more?

**Response:** Lyndsey explained that the team who run Fringe Central asked if they could run mental health wellbeing services and we were able to find the money to run it for two weeks. It was a new initiative added this year and it was enormously beneficial to artists and Fringe staff. We are hoping to be able to offer that for the entire festival in August in 2023 but also to potentially double the capacity of that as it was a positive and practical intervention. We could only afford two weeks this year. We are keen for it to come back for the duration of the festival next year and factor this in the Fringe Central budget for 2023.

Benny noted that as we were approaching the end of the session, he would ask Susan to flag those with raised hands and also address the questions in the chat section of the meeting.

**Question:** Mark Saltveit, producer and performer and commented that he heard a lot of pride being taken from the management about transparency and objective standards. But when we were discussing the funding decision to deny The Stand and PBH, a statement was made that it would be unfair to describe what the criteria are and how they were applied. In what sense could it possibly be unfair and to whom would it be unfair? That certainly did not feel objective or transparent. If the Fringe Society was worried about it being unfair to these organisations Peter Buckley Hill was there, and the Society could ask him. We could also ask representatives of The Stand.

**Response:** Benny replied that we had already said that the actual criteria were set out and anybody who entered the process were crystal clear on what the criteria were. Lyndsey has already mentioned that unsuccessful organisations were spoken to in great detail explaining

# Minutes

## Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society

### AGM

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as much as we could. We have also said that when we come back to doing this again, we will be clear on the criteria. Mark said that there quite a few criteria. The question is which particular one was graded poorly and on what basis and why are you unable to share with us at the AGM? Why are you keeping it specific only to people in your alleged statements to them which may or may not be true. We have no idea how accurate your claim of explaining that decision to them was, then why not just tell us right now? Benny replied that the Fringe Society would not share private and confidential information in a public forum. Comments that are untrue are unwelcome.

**Question:** Isabel Schmier commented that the pattern she had seen in this AGM was that decisions had been made but then, they were communicated later but not openly. Then someone found out about app, people became angry, contacted the Fringe Society and now we are in a situation where people have made their decisions and nothing can be done to amend them. She asked if the Fringe Society had strategies in place to their communications when decisions like this are being made? Because the decision was made in December 2021 but then only communicated in June 2022 which obviously made a big difference to a lot of people. Looking into the future, what strategies do you have in place to deal with that.

**Response:** Benny replied that he joined as Chair 15-16 months ago and he generally observed very good communications. We have exhausted the conversation on the app. We recognise that the communication on that was not as careful as it could have been and should have been. But it is not representative of the communications in general. Benny said he spoke to Shona almost every day and he was aware that a huge amount of dialogue takes place between the Society and all of the stakeholders across the eco system. We recognise as all organisations have to, the importance of communicating. It is especially important for the Fringe where there is not a single controlling body and its eco system has to cooperate and work well together to make it what it can be. In many aspects, it is a credit to everybody involved - venues, performers, producers and the Society. Isabel said that it was not just the app. It was also refunds. Benny remarked that it was a specific sequence of communication around the app and related refunds. He agreed with Isabel that it is important to communicate.

**Comments:** Marlene Zwickler expressed her dismay at the attack on the Fringe Society over the app. It was a communication issue but there was a global pandemic and everybody was finding their way through this. People are being very harsh. As somebody who has been championing keeping the registration fee the same, she pointed out that it did not go up when we had the app. She also noted with interest that edfest.com is channelling a lot of the 4% box office commission out of the Fringe Society's coffers which is money that could also be put into some of this. As one of the only people who put on a full Fringe last year, in a scale of venues going from 60 to 100 to 750, she thought the Fringe Society had navigated an impossible situation incredibly well. It has been rough, we have to react to situations, do all manner of things to keep going to get the shows up and running, to keep people safe, to create employment and figure out how to get through this. She was really tired of people looking for somebody else to blame for stuff being impossible to manage. It has been hard for everybody, everyone has their own journey, their own story and it has been difficult for every single person. The Fringe Society is doing a great job trying to be as inclusive as possible when it is clearly at the moment under attack. As a producer for 34 years, she was dismayed that people are chewing at the hand that supports the infrastructure that allows all of us to do our own

thing. She hoped that people would take a step back and look at some of the other things that are happening. How is the International Festival able to get so much funding that it could give away thousands of tickets in the first few days and make that a promo? How is it that the Fringe was give £1M loan to recover when everyone else received grants? She hoped that people will take a step back and remember that we might be back on wobbly terra firma now but we surely were not last year.

**Response:** Benny thanked Marlene for her thoughtful comments.

**Question:** Jemma Rowston remarked that the lack of a Half Price Hut this year especially for a show that was outside of the Big 4 was difficult as much as she supported the idea of going ticketless, and acknowledged the financial constraints involved. One for the secondary purposes of the Half Price Hut was that it forms a gathering space for audiences wanting actively to see shows and that gathering space is not a big venue or the Royal Mile. Are there any plans to either reinstate the Half Price Huts that are not just at the Royal Mile or Fringe Central and are there any plans to help facilitate more gathering spaces for audiences specially earlier in the day so that those performers who are not a part of the Big 4 have an opportunity to speak to willing audiences rather than finding themselves on street corners being told to leave.

**Response:** Lyndsey replied that we did not put the structure on the Mound this year because the structure that we used for the last ten years was no longer fit for purpose and we could not afford a new one. We did move the Half Price Hut to the High Street box office and that was quite successful. Your point about the way people gathered around the Hub and the ability to talk to them is useful feedback and she would take that back to them and think of a creative solution to support artists engaging with audiences actively looking for something to see. There were no further questions.

### **Any other business**

There was no further business to discuss.

The Chair thanked everybody for their attendance and contributions. We live in difficult times and now that we are out of the pandemic, we are facing some of the greyest economic and geopolitical circumstances including Brexit which has not gone away. On behalf of the Board and the Fringe Society, he thanked Shona and the team for the incredible hard work they have put in and expressed his pride in the team.

The Chair declared the 2022 Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM closed.