



fringe
society

Fill yer
boots!

Review of the year 2023



Contents

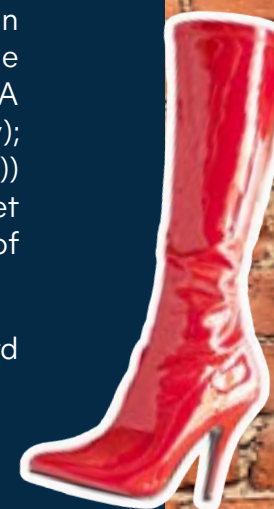
Chief Executive's introduction	02
Our vision and values	03
Giving anyone a stage	04
Giving everyone a seat	18
Celebrating the Fringe	26
Income and expenditure	30
A closing note from the Chair	32
Thank you	33

Photography by Roberto Ricciuti, Lesley Martin and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society.

Featuring: Rugg Tom Cat (Fringe street events); The Ice Hole: A Cardboard Comedy (Pleasance); Horizon Showcase: Little Wimmin (ZOO venues); Maryam Siddique (Fringe street events); Chirimbolo (Fringe street events); Le Gateau Chocolat; Satan vs God (C venues); Sophie's Surprise 29th (Underbelly); A Comedy of Operas (Pleasance); ELVIS DIED OF BURGERS (Meet the Media); Wasteman (Assembly); GUSH (Assembly); Choo Choo! (Or... Have You Ever Thought About ***** **** *? (Cos I Have)) (Pleasance); Muji Saleh, member of The Welcoming (Fringe Days Out); Fringe @ Broomhouse Street Party; Fringe @ Sikh Sanjog; Schools on the Street; Valley Park visit (Festival Connect); The Alphabet of Awesome Science (Underbelly).

© Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd 2023. All rights reserved. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd is a company limited by guarantee and incorporated in Scotland (no. SC046605).

Registered charity no. SC002995.



Chief Executive's introduction

The 2023 Fringe was joyful, exciting and brought a long-overdue sense of normality, and I'd like to kick off our review of this year with a heartfelt thank you to everyone who had a hand in making it happen. A massive thanks to the artists first and foremost, the venues and workers, members of the media and arts industry, the sponsors, politicians and officials and of course the amazing audiences and the city of Edinburgh itself – this year's festival was something to behold, and it wouldn't have worked without you.

The Fringe, as ever, captured the zeitgeist – a fantastic showcase of creativity, never without controversy, but always retaining its commitment to freedom of expression. I also picked up on a sense of optimism and joy at being able to let loose once more, and revel in the originality and quality of so many brilliant artists. Fifty of them had some support to come to the festival thanks to the new Keep it Fringe fund, established with a contribution from our honorary President, Phoebe Waller-Bridge – you can find out more about that project, and all the other work we've been doing, in the following pages.

You'll also find information on the Fringe app, which made a welcome return this year following its enforced absence (appsence?) in 2022. The app helped audiences and artists find each other, and integrated surprisingly smoothly with e-ticketing. We launched the app simultaneously with its own feedback form, the results of which will be instrumental in fine-tuning it ahead of Fringe 2024.

Whilst we celebrated having the joy back, this year was not without its challenges, and many of the problems we face will require some serious collective effort before they're solved. The affordability and availability of

accommodation in Edinburgh was and will continue to be an issue; there's also been a lot of uncertainty in recent months about the level of public arts and culture funding, which is crucial to sustaining the artists, the Fringe and Scotland's wider cultural sector.

The Fringe Society was founded by artists to provide central services to the Fringe and to support artists to participate; from those roots we have evolved into an organisation that advocates tirelessly for the performing arts with national and international policy-makers. We will continue to lobby for artists, for the Fringe creative community and for this extraordinary festival that plays such a vital role for the whole cultural ecosystem, locally and globally.

Shona McCarthy

Chief Executive



Our vision and values

There are many contributors to the Fringe, and when we all come together, we help ensure the performing arts stay on the map. In 2022, to mark the 75th anniversary of the festival and futureproof the Fringe to meet upcoming changes and challenges, we consulted with stakeholders from across the festival – from artists to venues, residents to government bodies – to create a shared vision and set of values.

The vision is **“to give anyone a stage and everyone a seat”**. Rooted in equality and inclusiveness, this will inspire us all to pull in the same direction.

Our three values guide the behaviours and decisions of everyone involved with the Fringe, giving us a shared focus and enabling the festival to be the best version of itself:

- **Celebrate performing arts**
- **Be open to all**
- **Look out for each other**

This vision is accompanied by six [Fringe development goals](#). Each sets ambitious targets designed to ensure the long-term survival and renewal of the festival.



Thriving artists

Be the best place in the world for emerging artists to perform and the best platform for talent to emerge.

Fair work

Eradicate any remaining unfair or exploitative work conditions at the Fringe.

Climate action

Become a carbon net zero event by 2030.

Equitable Fringe

Ensure that who you are and where you are from is not a barrier to attending or performing at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Good citizenship

The Fringe, a force for good in and for the city of Edinburgh.

Digital evolution

Enhance the live Fringe experience by ensuring a world-class digital experience.

Giving anyone a stage



Supporting artists

One of the Fringe Society's core charitable objectives is to support any artist or company that wants to bring a show to the Fringe, and we work hard, year-round, to provide that support at every stage of their journey.

We've kept our show registration fees frozen at their current rate since 2007, and have maintained commission for the Fringe Box Office at only 4% since 2013.

Our Artist Development team holds one-to-one meetings with artists throughout the year, helping them define their goals and prepare for the festival – they held over a hundred pre-Fringe meetings this year, a dramatic increase on 2022. Similarly, our Artist Support team fields queries and provides bespoke advice to Fringe artists on a wide variety of topics all year round, including finding a venue, visa requirements and music licensing. Over the last 12 months the Artist Services team have responded to almost 25,000 enquiries. We aim to help as quickly and efficiently as possible – around half of senders received a response in under six working hours, with an overall average response time of 10 hours – not bad for a festival of over 3,500 shows, from a year-round departmental staff of just 10.

We also use our website, edfringe.com, to provide step-by-step resources for artists at every stage of their journey to the Fringe. A new self-help form, signposting artists to the resources most relevant to their needs, has been used more than 5,000 times since launching in January.

Access for artists

One of the ways we support artists is by making the Fringe as accessible as possible to them, and by helping them make their work accessible too. Nearly half the [recipients of our Keep it Fringe fund](#) (see page 16) described themselves as disabled or having a health condition, and some of the funding they were awarded was used to cover access costs at the Fringe, among other expenditures.

This year we launched a pilot project with theatre captioning company Digital 4, providing two Fringe venues with a captioning unit while also making captioning hardware, software and training available to Fringe artists. These resources enable artists to make their shows more accessible to audiences who are D/deaf, hard of hearing or speak English as a second language.

We launched our inaugural relaxed session for Meet the Media this August (see page 11), adapting the annual media pitching opportunity to better suit neurodivergent attendees, who can find the noise and busyness of the event overwhelming. The feedback we received on both the session and the sensory resources we provided as part of it has been overwhelmingly positive, and we hope to make it a permanent fixture at future Fringes.

For information on the access services we provide to audiences, see page 20.

Accommodation

The Fringe Society is extremely conscious of the availability and affordability of accommodation for Fringe artists and the barrier this presents to participation in the festival. Building on the accommodation survey we issued at the close of Fringe 2022, we've worked on several fronts to find solutions, engaging with local and national government in conversations around short-term lets legislation and liaising with accommodation providers around the city to secure beds for artists at affordable rates.

Our artist accommodation portal had more than 750 beds with eight providers (Herriot-Watt, Napier, Oatridge College, Queen Margaret University, StudentCastle Edinburgh, Unite Student and University of Edinburgh); some beds and rooms remained available in August, meaning even those shows that registered close to the Fringe had options.

We've also explored opportunities with partners to facilitate a quality campsite for the Fringe, and are working to progress these conversations ahead of next year.



Street events

The Fringe street events are world-famous, drawing artists from across the globe to perform on the iconic Royal Mile and Mound precinct to crowds of locals and visitors. With around 120 shows every day of the Fringe – featuring a wide variety of artists, from experienced street performers to young buskers learning the ropes – the street events offer something for everyone and are free to access for all. They are a brilliant and often magical way to get a first experience of performance art.

On 24 and 25 August we handed over control of our taster stage on the Mound to a line-up of 14 artists from local community organisations, who performed over the course of the day. The feedback we received from the community groups was incredibly positive, suggesting it was a good introduction to performing at the Fringe, and some performers have already shown interest in busking at next year's street events.

As a registered charity, the Fringe Society relies on funding and partners to deliver this much-loved aspect of the festival; the Fringe street events would not have been possible this year without support from EventScotland and the City of Edinburgh Council. We're also proud to work alongside fellow local companies to deliver the Fringe; we were delighted to welcome Belhaven Brewery to the Mound and work with Edinburgh's own Unique Events on event delivery and public safety.



Fringe Central: Artist Hub

Fringe Central is our in-person base where we provide support and services to Fringe participants each August. It was split across two locations in 2023 – our Artist Hub was situated in the Quaker Meeting House on Victoria Terrace, while the Media and Arts Industry Offices were in Appleton Tower, just off George Square, thanks to support from the University of Edinburgh.

To start the festival with a bang, we booked drag, cabaret and opera star Le Gateau Chocolat to deliver the artists' welcome address on Friday 04 August. He did so with aplomb, letting his fellow performers know that **“there is magic”** at the Fringe and adding,

“You can and will be in conversation with your audiences – my hope for artists present, and all artists at this festival, is that you indeed find audiences. You are enough and the experiences that have brought you to this moment are valid.”

We put a focus on artists' mental health and wellbeing in 2023, forming a new partnership with local mental health charity Health in Mind to provide a dedicated phone line, bookable one-to-one support sessions, weekly workshops and a daily drop-in at Fringe Central for anyone who needed them during the festival.

The Fringe Central events programme for artists and arts industry featured more than 50 sessions, networking opportunities and workshops covering areas such as career development and issues facing the sector. Over 1,600 Fringe participants signed up to events in this year's

programme, which included collaborations with more than 30 partners and explored a variety of topics such as onward touring advice, inequalities in the arts and developing works-in-progress.

We also invited artists to a weekly Fringe Feast, where a selection of pizzas and snacks were provided by new partners Butta Burger, catering for up to 100 artists on three Sundays during August.



Over 1,600 participants engaged with our Fringe Central events programme.

Working collaboratively

Considering the scale of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the Fringe Society is a relatively small charity, with a year-round staff of around 40 people. As stated in our vision and values (see page 03), we recognise that supporting this amazing festival requires input from across the entire Fringe ecosystem, and we work with external partners on projects to support the Fringe's various constituent groups. This year we've worked with partners including:

- **Birds of Paradise**, who provided valuable consultation to the ongoing development of our registration system, delivered training sessions, hosted a meet-up for disabled artists and provided resources for Fringe companies looking to make their work more accessible
- **Nouveau Riche**, who began a project to help us understand and address the barriers faced by Fringe artists who identify as black and / or global majority, and provided support for the wellbeing and welfare of artists of colour
- **Somewhere**, who helped us shape our approach to inclusion at Fringe Central and produced another brilliant LGBTQ+ Edinburgh Fringe guide to increase the visibility, platform and support of LGBTQ+ narratives and practitioners at the Fringe.

We also supported grassroots initiatives such as FemiFringe, F-Bomb Theatre's project to support and platform work by women and those from marginalised genders, which published its own guide to the festival and hosted two events at Fringe Central; the #FringeForAll initiative, highlighting the barriers faced by working-class artists participating in the festival; and Best in Class, a recipient of Keep it Fringe funding (see page 16)

platforming working-class voices. Another initiative, from stand-up Dion Owen, provided free bicycles to fellow artists in Edinburgh during the festival – a project we're hoping to help expand in 2024.

Alongside Summerhall, we co-launched the Summerhall Surgeries in August, a paid opportunity and space for 16 prospective Fringe artists and companies to showcase excerpts of unfinished work to an audience of peers and industry figures. These events provided a safe, collaborative and creative playground where emerging and early-career artists could try out new ideas, gain invaluable feedback from the amazing creative community who were in the city, and shape work that could evolve into future Fringe performances.

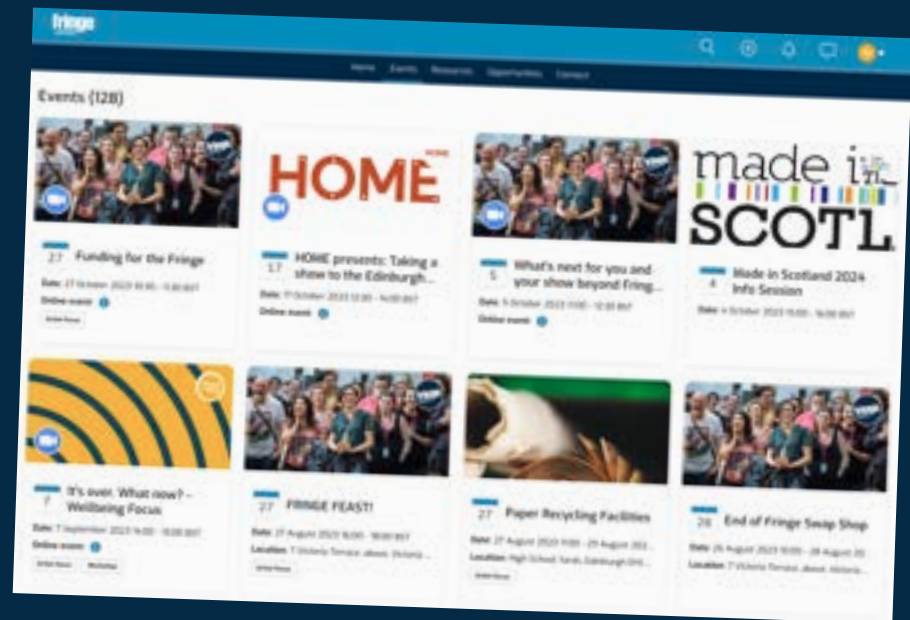
Our FringeMakers partnership with Crowdfunder continued in 2023, giving artists a fee-free platform to raise money for their Fringe shows.





Fringe Connect

[Fringe Connect](#) is our digital counterpart to Fringe Central – an online platform where Fringe artists and arts industry can attend digital events, discover opportunities and meet potential collaborators. It's where we host recordings of Fringe Central events, giving artists a chance to catch up on anything they missed during the festival, as well as year-round information sessions giving potential participants an insight into what's involved in bringing a show to Edinburgh. Between September 2022 and July 2023, we hosted 18 events on Fringe Connect, and we now have a user base of 7,500 and counting.



**Fringe Connect
has 7,500
registered users
and counting!**

**3,800 reviews
uploaded to
edfringe.com show
listings**



Connecting artists with media

Reviews are a critical tool for Fringe artists, for both raising their profile and encouraging audiences to seek out their work, so we support media at the festival alongside artists. Our Media Office accredited 840 journalists, reviewers and broadcasters for this year's Fringe – an 8% increase on 2022. The BBC, Daily Mail, Evening Standard, Financial Times, Guardian, Independent, Metro, Scotsman, Spectator, Stage, Telegraph and the Times were among the outlets accredited, giving Fringe artists (and the festival itself) an invaluable nationwide profile.

In total, more than 400 individual media outlets were represented, including 102 individuals from international outlets (up from 50 in 2022 and 70 in 2019). The number of countries represented also increased, with media attending from Australia, China, France, Hungary, India, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan, Taiwan, Ukraine, the UAE and the US, among others.

Our Media team uploaded more than 3,800 reviews to edfringe.com show listings in 2023, a near 40% increase on 2022. The number of shows with a review on edfringe.com also increased from last year – more than 1,400 in 2023 compared to 1,113 in 2022, marking a 27% increase year-on-year.

**840 accredited
media professionals,
representing 400
local, national and
international outlets.**

Meet the Media

Our annual Meet the Media event takes place on the first Saturday of the Fringe, giving artists a chance to meet with some of the publications covering the festival in the hopes of securing coverage for their shows.

Representatives from Broadway Baby, Fringe Biscuit, FringeReview, the List, Neurodiverse Review, Playbill, the Scotsman, the Stage and the Wee Review all attended, while TikTok returned for a second year to advise attendees on using the platform to their advantage.

More than 600 participants from 316 shows attended the event, as did Fringe Society honorary President Phoebe Waller-Bridge, who spent over an hour talking to participants about their shows.

Meet the Media was preceded by a relaxed session for neurodivergent artists (see page 05); we also brought back our online counterpart, #TweetTheMedia, on the first Friday of the Fringe, and added a second session midway through August to support any artists who had been unable to take part in the others.



Supporting journalistic talent

In June we launched a new emerging critics programme to promote arts journalism as an attractive and viable career choice for aspiring writers. This was supported by funding through the Give Someone a Stage fund, previously the Save the Fringe fund, which supports initiatives that benefit the wider Fringe. Nine early-career journalists took part in the project; they were supported through a learning programme in the lead-up to the Fringe, then attended the festival in August to review shows and see their work published. The titles supporting this pilot were Broadway Baby, Chortle, Fest, the Herald, the List, Neurodiverse Review, the Scotsman, the Skinny and the Wee Review.

In partnership with the Scotsman, we also brought back our Young Writers Award at Fringe 2023. Writer and theatremaker Katie Kirkpatrick was announced as the winner in September; she will receive one-to-one mentoring from arts writers at the Scotsman and paid work as part of the paper's review team at Fringe 2024.

Supporting artists on social media

While the Fringe Society is unable to promote individual shows on our social media channels, we've developed ways to amplify artists' own efforts. Our #QuickFlyer Friday sessions encouraged artists to use the #QuickFlyer hashtag as a digital flying technique, creating an online equivalent to the Royal Mile where audiences could discover shows. The sessions took place regularly from spring until the end of the Fringe; we also created guidance on edfringe.com to help artists fine-tune their posts to best sell their shows.

Between 31 March and 25 August, we shared more than 500 #QuickFlyer posts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). As we got closer to the Fringe, we also shared artists' #QuickFlyer posts on Instagram Stories – around 200 every week!

For the third year, we created slots throughout August when Fringe venues could take over our Instagram Stories, working collaboratively and sharing tools to spread the enjoyment of the festival.

TikTok, the Official Virtual Stage of the Fringe

Following last year's inaugural festival partnership, TikTok returned for Fringe 2023, once again supporting artists with online guidance and workshops on the best ways to reach new audiences using the platform. TikTok also donated £50,000 in advertising credits to recipients of the Keep it Fringe fund (see page 16) and gave away a further £50,000 in ad credits via a prize draw on the @edfringe TikTok account.

Speaking of which, the [@edfringe TikTok account](#) was able to engage with new audiences of its own this summer, gaining over 30,000 new followers and generating more than 8.9mn impressions with our Fringe-focused video content, including a series of videos by TikTok stars (and 2022 Fringe artists) the Sugarcoated Sisters.



International artists and arts industry

The Fringe is proudly international in outlook, and we work hard to support the array of artists it attracts from around the world. We liaise with the Home Office to ensure the Fringe remains on the list of permit-free UK festivals, meaning artists can perform here without requiring a certificate of sponsorship. This year our Artist Support team issued over 730 Welcome Letters to 575 artists and companies travelling from 70 different countries, ultimately assisting 2,577 international company members.

Our Arts Industry Office accredited 1,395 delegates from 50 countries this year, and our team engaged with and supported international delegations from Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Québec, Taiwan, Thailand and the US. Around a quarter of visiting delegates stayed for at least three weeks of the festival, while the average length of stay was 12 days, demonstrating the Fringe's importance as an arts marketplace to discover and buy work. 40% of delegates had not accredited before, showing real success in our year-round work to develop connections with industry professionals.

This was in addition to receiving visiting ministers and senior officials from Australia, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the US and Vietnam; we're excited to grow these relationships in future years and maintain the Fringe's reputation as an unparalleled international platform for creativity.

Fringe Marketplace

[Fringe Marketplace](#) is a digital resource we've developed to help arts industry delegates connect with professional work at the festival that is seeking onward opportunities. It's designed to help producers, presenters and programmers from across the arts and screen sectors discover shows that match their objectives, ultimately leading to them booking work, developing talent or creating new connections and networking.

We expanded the scope of Fringe Marketplace in 2023, giving more artists and companies the opportunity to showcase their work, with nearly 400 shows listed from across 27 venues. We also hosted a series of 'Programme Insights' sessions on [Fringe Connect](#) during July, working with our Industry Associates and venue programmers to give accredited industry members informed perspectives on exciting work in the programme as they planned their diaries for August.

Fringe Marketplace remains active well beyond August, widening the window of opportunity for artists to extend the lifespan of their work.

**1,395 accredited
arts industry
delegates, from
50 countries.**



Made in Scotland

The Made in Scotland showcase returned in 2023, highlighting the best of Scotland's dance, music and theatre talent through a programme of 18 shows. The shows explored a range of themes including life and death, loss, violence and addiction, as well as everyday life through emerging parenthood and family.

The showcase is a prominent platform for homegrown artists, giving them a spotlight on the international stage rightfully placed with the world's best performers. Running in tandem, our Made in Scotland delegate programme encouraged deeper engagement with the showcase from arts industry professionals, increasing the value of the experience for the artists featured.

The Made in Scotland showcase is made possible through funding from the Scottish Government's Festivals Expo Fund and is a partnership between the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, Creative Scotland, the Federation of Scottish Theatre and the Scottish Music Centre.

Voices from the South

Voices from the South was an international online showcase of performance work at Fringe 2023, facilitated by the Fringe Society and co-curated and delivered by partner organisations from Brazil, India, Mexico, Scotland and South Africa. The project involved 15 artists and companies who engaged in an 18-month period of exchange and conversation while preparing to present their work online at Fringe 2023.

Over the course of the project, each partner organisation hosted online sessions offering insights into the artists and their working processes, ideas and inspiration, as well as the circumstances in which they work and live. These sessions were made possible by the help of live simultaneous translators joining the online calls.

Works included in the showcase spanned theatre, dance, music and multi-disciplinary performance, and explored themes such as identity, community, social justice, labour politics, tradition and history, sustainability and nature, immigration and relationships, femininity and womanhood, technology and more.

Since being established in 2009, Made in Scotland has supported 259 shows.

The onward touring fund has supported over 100 productions in visiting over 40 countries.



Emerging Producers Development Programme

Through our Emerging Producers Development Programme we provided financial and professional support to 15 emerging UK-based producers, helping them expand their networks and develop their learning and creative insight at the festival. This programme is a vital inroad to the Fringe for industry members early in their careers – a third of the participants told us that they would not have attended without it.



Screen Fringe

The Fringe has been a historic proving ground for shows and artists who have gone on to screen success – in the past decade alone, they've included Rose Matafeo (Starstruck), Taskmaster, Adura Onashile (Expensive Shit), Kieran Hurley (Beats), Richard Gadd (Baby Reindeer) and our own honorary President, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, who this year celebrated 10 years since the initial staging of Fleabag at Fringe 2013. We support these kinds of career pathways via Screen Fringe, our ongoing collaboration with Screen Scotland that helps film, TV and screen professionals discover new work and talent at the festival.

This year the Screen Fringe team engaged with development executives and commissioners from organisations including Film4, BBC Film and BBC Writersroom, providing expert support for navigating the festival programme; hosted Fringe Central events with Kieran Hurley and TV production company Mam Tor; and continued to develop a strong roster of contacts for future Fringes. The overall number of accredited screen delegates increased by 10% compared to 2022.



Keep it Fringe

In March we launched the Keep it Fringe fund, a new initiative intended to level the playing field for Fringe artists. Created from donations to the Fringe Society from the public, together with donated profits from sales of a bespoke Edinburgh Gin collaboration with Fringe Society honorary President Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the fund also included a £50,000 contribution from Phoebe's Fleabag for Charity fund, resulting in a £100,000 funding pot to support 50 artists and companies. We recognised that these funds wouldn't make or break a show but were instead intended to provide some measure of financial help to those who wanted to take part in the Fringe.

**£100,000
Keep it Fringe
funding.**



“The festival would not have been financially possible for us without the grant... Professionally, the show has led to interest from venues, agents and an expansion of our professional and creative networks.”

(Eloïse Poulton, Healing King Herod)

More than 670 artists and companies applied, with submissions assessed by a diverse external panel on the lookout for shows that captured the defiant spirit of the Fringe. The [50 successful recipients](#) represented a great breadth of variety and diversity, their work covering topics from climate action and OCD to parenthood and migration, and spanning disciplines including comedy, musicals, spoken word, ventriloquist horror, immersive theatre, drag and performance art. Nearly half the successful applicants described themselves as disabled or having a health condition, and one in three came from a working-class background.

Core to the fund's ethos was the understanding that recipients could spend their award however they saw fit; some expenditures mentioned during the application process included childcare, transportation, media and PR support and help to meet Living Wage pay. In addition to the core grant of £2,000 each, recipients also had access to supplementary benefits such as a share of £50,000 in advertising credits and a training session with TikTok, free return train tickets with Lumo and an in-person meet-up with each other and Phoebe Waller-Bridge at the Fringe.

**670 Keep
it Fringe
applications.**



“Without the Fringe fund we would be coming out of the Fringe with no money to keep the group going, so thank you for all the help! ... We have made huge progress in terms of our professional connections and ambitions... Most importantly we have secured representation to take our show to the next level.”

(Issy Wroe Wright, Flat and the Curves: Divadom)

Recipients' feedback from the inaugural year of Keep it Fringe has been resoundingly positive.

Nine Keep it Fringe shows went on to receive award wins or nominations, including two Scotsman Fringe First awards.

Keep it Fringe 2023 was a pilot and our hope is to provide direct financial support for Fringe artists every year, widening eligibility where possible. If you or your organisation can help contribute to the Keep it Fringe fund, or widen its reach, please contact support.us@edfringe.com.

“It's allowed me to focus completely on creating my show and making it what I want it to be... It's allowed me much more freedom and headspace than I have ever had before at the Fringe... thank you guys once again for setting up the fund. It's changed my year, creatively and mentally, in a massive way.”

(Tom Mayhew, This Time Next Year, We'll Be Millionaires)



**Nine Keep it Fringe
shows went on to
receive award wins or
nominations, including
two Scotsman Fringe
First awards.**

... and everyone a seat



Helping audiences

As well as supporting artists to come to the Fringe, one of our core charitable objectives is to help audiences navigate the festival. We do this through a variety of services, including running a centralised box office, publishing the printed Fringe programme and hosting listings for all 3,553 Fringe shows on our website, edfringe.com, and on the official Fringe app.

Of the 2.4mn tickets issued at this year's festival, more than 1.8mn were issued through Fringe Box Office sales channels, a 14% increase on 2022. We also brought back Half Price Hut offers in the main Box Office at 180 High Street, giving Fringe artists another way to entice audiences into their shows and help audiences try something new.

We invested in significant improvements to our web services, including secure payment updates allowing customers to save card details and use Apple and Google Pay to purchase tickets. Our website welcomed 3.6mn users in 2023 – an increase of over 370,000 on 2022 – and generated 38mn page views.

As in 2022, we printed 175,000 copies of the [Fringe programme](#). We're working to gradually reduce this number in line with our aims to make the festival more environmentally sustainable (see page 29), while also ensuring audiences have as many ways as possible to discover their new favourite Fringe artists – including the new Fringe app.

The Fringe app

Following an enforced absence in 2022, we launched a new Fringe app in 2023. The new iteration included many features familiar from previous years, such as the ability to find shows starting soon using the 'nearby now' function. Users could also book tickets and store e-ticket QR codes in their account area, which synced automatically with their account on edfringe.com, while booked performances were integrated into a daily planner – a feature that was used 1.8mn times during the festival!

The Fringe app has been downloaded over 80,000 times, and we're already hard at work collating feedback to develop the next iteration in time for Fringe 2024.

E-ticketing

Paperless ticketing returned for this year's festival, supported through sponsorship by Johnnie Walker Princes Street; audience members simply showed a QR code at their venue to gain entry. We made these codes available via several methods – they were delivered to ticket-buyers via email, and also stored in their edfringe.com and Fringe app account areas; in situations where there was limited internet access, we ensured venues had a list of attendees' names, meaning e-ticketing would not present a barrier to entering a show. Anyone requiring physical tickets, whether due to access requirements or other reasons, could collect them from our accessible box office in the High Street.

Paperless ticketing is an important part of the Fringe's environmental sustainability goals (see page 29), and we'll continue working with venues to enhance and streamline e-ticketing at the festival over the coming years.

Access for audiences

We want the Fringe to be the most inclusive festival in the world. While we recognise there's collectively much more work to do before we get there, we're proud of the work we've done so far to improve access at the Fringe.

We saw a 33% increase in engagement with our [access bookings service](#), which assists anyone with an access requirement to make the most of the Fringe, including booking specific accessibility services (eg a hearing loop), complimentary personal assistant tickets and tickets for wheelchair users, as well as finding specific access information about individual venues and spaces. Available via phone, WhatsApp, email or in person at 180 High Street, the access bookings service was available from February in line with the Fringe Box Office. 61% of shows at this year's Fringe were in level-access spaces.

We provide guidance to performers to help them make enhancements to their shows, such as incorporating captioning, British Sign Language interpretation, audio description or relaxed performances; we've also dedicated a section in the programme and a page on our website where ticket-buyers can browse these performances. There were more than 1,300 enhanced performances this year.

As in previous years, we were delighted to work with Deaf Action to provide British Sign Language interpretation at street performances on West Parliament Square on three dates in August. This stage also featured a carpeted area for the duration of the festival, where wheelchair users could view the performances unobstructed.

Working with the Scottish Association of Mental Health, we arranged for their Wellbeing on Wheels bus to be stationed close to St Giles Cathedral on 12 and 13 August, providing drop-in mental health support for anyone who wished to use it, including local residents, Fringe artists, street performers and members of the public. More than 250 people engaged with the bus's services over the weekend, including 52 one-to-one sessions.

We once again arranged for a temporary Changing Places toilet to be installed near George Square, providing accessible toilets with an adult-sized changing bench and hoist for festival-goers unable to use a standard accessible toilet. We are grateful to Assembly for operating the facility during this year's festival.

In 2023 we redeveloped our Venue Access Award, designed to support venues with making their spaces more accessible to disabled people. We also once again offered free online equalities training for all Fringe Society and venue staff.

Through support from Jack Arts, a city-wide outdoor campaign ran during July and August which highlighted our access services, including our access booking service, our Fringe Days Out programme (see page 21) and our sensory resources project.

1,300 performances offered enhancements such as audio description, BSL or captioning.

Sensory resources

Since 2018 we've provided sensory backpacks containing tools and resources to help make the festival environment more manageable for neurodiverse audience members. That project was reconfigured in 2023, providing the option to 'pick n mix' a variety of 12 sensory resources and five different bag options; with the exception of ear defenders, audience members could take home and keep the sensory tools if they wished.

More than 300 online pre-orders were placed for the resources throughout August; we also supplied sensory tools to support 80 artists at the Fringe Central: Artist Hub (see page 07), and provided sensory resources for an additional 300 artists at our relaxed Meet the Media event (see page 11).

“I cried with joy when I received [my sensory backpack] as it feels so unbelievable sometimes that people care and are willing to help with adjustment and support.”

(Sensory resource user)

As part of the rebooted resources offer, we collaborated with a neurodivergent artist to create a [visual timetable](#), helping neurodiverse people plan their trips to the Fringe. These timetables were available to pre-order, pick up at the Fringe Box Office or to download.

16,000 Fringe Days Out visits since 2017.



Fringe Days Out

We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to express themselves through creativity and experience the thrill of live performance. The Fringe Days Out scheme, launched in 2017, provides over 30 Edinburgh-based charities and community groups with Fringe ticket vouchers and bus passes, so that their service users' whole festival experience is free to access. Since its launch, just over 16,000 people from across Edinburgh have been able to visit the festival through Fringe Days Out, many of whom had never experienced the Fringe before.

Working with Baillie Gifford, we were excited to be able to increase the value of vouchers donated this year by £10,000. The number of vouchers redeemed through the project was also up, at 91% – the highest redemption rate in the project's history. While these figures show a clear benefit to audiences in Edinburgh, the project also benefits

Fringe artists – giving a broader audience the chance to discover their work while the vouchers' value contributes to their box office takings. Fringe Days Out is one of our flagship community engagement projects, and we are thrilled to watch it go from strength to strength.

Community events

In addition to its core purpose, Fringe Days Out (see page 21) gives us the opportunity to explore additional projects with our partner organisations on their home turf, giving the members of their communities the chance to experience a taste of the Fringe in places convenient and familiar to them.

Our Fringe@... events take place in neighbourhoods around the city, offering a full day of family-friendly activities including show excerpts, street performances, face painting, arts and crafts, street food and a dedicated box office where attendees can browse and book Fringe tickets using their Fringe Days Out vouchers. We held three Fringe@... events in 2023, working with Sikh Sanjog, Stepping Stones North Edinburgh and the Broomhouse Street Party. There were approximately 1,800 attendees across all three events, with 12 artists and companies taking part.

“Not everyone has the opportunity to go into the centre of town and experience the festival for themselves; it might be that they are isolated, it might just be a loneliness factor, it might be money that they can't afford to go and do those things. So if we can bring a little bit of that out to here, it adds to our day, it adds to the local community's experience here and it's brilliant, and it's in our plans that we continue to do this every year.”

(Neil Hay, CEO of Space @ The Broomhouse Hub)

As part of a similar project, Fringe up your Street, we matched eight community groups with individual artists and street performers, presenting a Fringe performance experience in their own area. These events reached 456 people and provided paid employment for six artists.

Another project, Fringe in Communities, gave artists the opportunity to run workshops with community groups outwith the festival. This year two artists ran six sessions with two community groups, for approximately 30 people.





“This year I’m fostering unaccompanied asylum seekers. I’ve been trying to help them and their friends access events and experience things in Edinburgh that are either low or no cost as their disposable income is very limited. I organised to take them to shows that didn’t require English so that everyone, regardless of their language ability, could enjoy the experience. It was such a pleasure to experience it with them and to see their awe and wonder at the variety they were exposed to. For young people who have been through so much, it was a great opportunity to be temporarily distracted from their situations and have a little fun.”

(Kate, Community Ticketing Initiative user)

Community Ticketing Initiative

In previous years, our Children and Young People (CYP) ticketing scheme has provided a way for Fringe companies and artists to donate tickets to be used by care-experienced children and young people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to attend. Working with the City of Edinburgh Council and EVOC, an Edinburgh-based umbrella organisation for third-sector organisations, we expanded this in 2023 to apply to anyone in the city, child or adult, who is at risk, vulnerable, marginalised or isolated, or experiencing additional barriers to attending the festival.

More than 1,200 shows volunteered to take part in the Community Ticketing Initiative this year – an incredible show of generosity from Fringe artists. On behalf of ourselves and the users of the initiative, we want to express our gratitude to everyone who agreed to take part.



Engaging with young people

The Fringe Society works with schools and teachers on a variety of projects, aiming to foster a lifelong passion for the arts among Scotland's young people and inspire the next generation of Fringe artists and audiences.

Among our various education and outreach projects is a schools-specific extension of Fringe Days Out (see page 21). Classes from three Edinburgh high schools organised their own trips to the festival as part of the project this year, with the students self-directing every step – from choosing a show to buying tickets and making their way to the venue.

A total of 625 students and 64 staff saw 34 shows at Fringe 2023. Their feedback spoke of the benefits they experienced with regards to increased confidence levels, feeling able to take risks, exposure to the performing arts, team building, bonding with other students and staff, developing an interest in future arts careers and feeling a part of their city.

“It’s an incredible experience – not only the show is amazing but going around Edinburgh and seeing the culture of the Fringe is just as or maybe even more amazing.”

(St Augustine’s student)

A pilot project for 2023, the Young Fringe Ambassadors were a group of high school students (S1–S3) who visited venues, met with industry professionals and attended workshops to find out information about career pathways in the arts and creative industries.

“The biggest thing I have learned was how nice and welcoming people in the arts are or how hard people backstage work, as well as the people onstage. It has made me interested in exploring a career in the arts because of how it seems so interesting, and everyone works together as a team to make something.”

(Young Fringe Ambassador)

Schools on the Street saw nearly 200 young people – comprising young choir members, dancers, musicians and actors – perform joyously on the Mound taster stage as part of the Fringe street events. Four schools enhanced their experience by following their performance with a tour from a street performer.

Our Students at the Fringe pilot project launched this year, aiming to support and engage students aged 18 and over who are coming to the Fringe in any capacity – we’re hoping to expand this in future years.

Finally, our Fringe in Schools project offered funding for Fringe participants to run creative projects outwith Fringe time with local Edinburgh children and young people from additional support needs (ASN) schools. Two artists worked with a total of 80 students between January and March 2023.



“I love to see how shows are staged and at the Fringe they are usually quite simple due to having a quick turnaround for the following performers. This is really helpful as, when putting on a performance at school, we don't have the resources to make it as spectacular as we would sometimes like. The stage designers are inspiring as they use simple scenery, lighting, sound and props for maximum impact.”

(Teachers' Theatre Club participant)

Engaging with teachers

Our Teachers' Theatre Club (in collaboration with Imagine) entered its final year in 2023, with 10 teachers from across Edinburgh and the Lothians engaging with performers and their work throughout the year. Participants fed back that the Club enabled them to build networks and develop their confidence in engaging with the performing arts in a way that can be relevant in their classrooms.

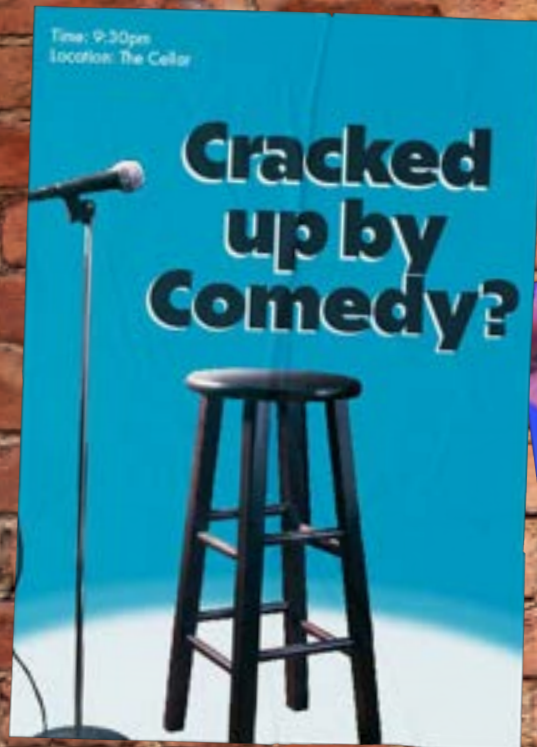
While this is the final year of Teachers' Theatre Club, the project has given us excellent foundations to further develop our schools programme, and an enthusiastic and engaged network of teachers across Edinburgh and the Lothians to involve with future initiatives.

We were also able to offer free tickets to some shows in the Voices from the South digital showcase (see page 14) to teachers of any subject, school or year group across Scotland. This presented an opportunity for educators to engage in international Fringe work from the global south, to be inspired by artists making work with and for young people, as well as politically and socially engaged work that could offer transferable skills into the classroom environment.

200 young people took part in Schools on the Street.



Celebrating the Fringe



Marketing the Fringe

Our popular Fringe 2023 campaign centred around the phrase 'Fill Yer Boots', which means 'to get as much of something valuable or desirable as you can' – a phrase that encapsulates the unrivalled range and diversity on offer at the Fringe. It's a phrase that's also grounded in Scottish warmth and energy, a nod to our beloved hometown. The Fringe wouldn't be the Fringe without Edinburgh.

Visually, we wanted the campaign to capture the same energy as that phrase – the buzzing anticipation of waiting for a performance to begin and seeing posters for all the other shows at the Fringe, and from Fringes past. The bare brick wall, plastered with posters and stickers from throughout the ages, captures an incredibly Fringe-y vibe – one that integrated well into our new merchandise range for 2023, featuring hoodies, totes, posters... and socks, so audiences could literally fill their boots!

Social media

We used our social media channels to spread word of Fringe 2023, to great success – we gained more than 70,000+ new followers across all our social platforms, reaching a combined audience of nearly 600,000 followers and creating over 20.6mn impressions.

Analysis of the #edfringe hashtag shows that sentiment was 92% positive, proving that audiences love the Fringe as much as we do!

**600,000
combined
followers across
our social media
channels.**

Media coverage

One of our core objectives is to promote the whole Fringe rather than focusing on individual shows, generating national and international attention for the festival with the aim of attracting a larger audience for all artists.

We achieve this through careful planning and key communication milestones in the lead-up to the Fringe. The launch of our 2023 programme, for example, gained high-profile coverage from outlets around the UK, including BBC News, the Guardian, the Herald, the Scotsman, the Stage, STV News and many more. Photos from the programme launch were also used extensively in subsequent festival-related coverage throughout August.

There was an increased presence from broadcast media at Fringe 2023, with episodes of BBC Breakfast, The One Show and This Morning recorded on location in Edinburgh during August.



Eddie Izzard x Edinburgh Gin

Following a limited-edition collaboration with the Fringe Society's honorary President, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, in 2022, Edinburgh Gin launched a new gin with Fringe Patron Eddie Izzard for 2023. Profits from the sales of both collaborations are donated to our Give Someone a Stage campaign, a fund dedicated to supporting activity across the Fringe landscape.



A new Fringe community hub

Announced as one of eight commitments in our 70th anniversary Blueprint in 2017, the Fringe Society has long sought out new premises where we can establish a Fringe community hub to better serve artists during August and throughout the year. In March 2023, the Chancellor announced £7mn from the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda – to be distributed through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) – to support the delivery of a new Fringe community hub and home for the Fringe Society, specifying that it is capital funding (not revenue) and cannot be used for any other purpose.

At the time of writing, the Fringe Society has submitted an outline business case to DCMS with a preferred option that is focused on refurbishment, sustainability and accessibility. If successful, the project would see us rejuvenate a heritage building, consolidate a long-term community partnership and create a public-facing space that can be used by a variety of Fringe constituent groups in a way not possible in our current premises.

If we successfully secure the funding, we expect plans for the new community hub to progress over the next two years; in the meantime, we will continue to lobby for further financial support directly for artists, tax relief for venues and other routes to sustained investment in collective Fringe issues.



Sustainability

We know the long-term future of the festival requires action from everyone involved in the Fringe, and we're working to lead the charge on its environmental sustainability.

This includes our conversion to paperless ticketing across the festival (see page 19) and the launch of a new sustainability survey for artists and venues, gathering baseline data to help us track our progress against sustainability targets. We're also gathering data on the Fringe Society's own carbon footprint, while part of the funding for our new community hub (see page 28) is dedicated to ensuring it will be environmentally sustainable.

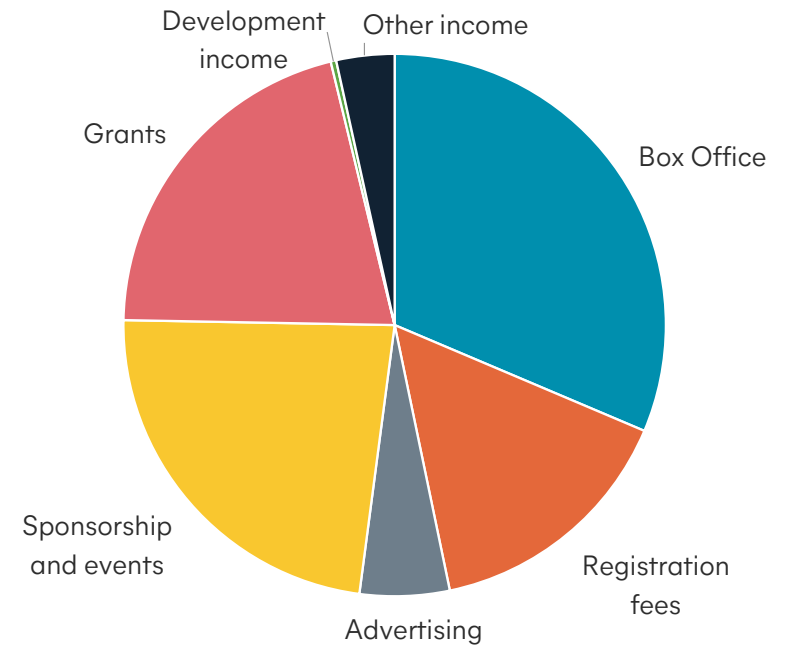
The Fringe Society is a founding signatory of the Edinburgh Climate Compact, a commitment by local businesses and employers to make the necessary changes within their organisations and sectors to support the radical reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the city, and to continue seeking partnerships with those who can help us attain our climate action goals. Alongside other festivals and the City of Edinburgh Council, we're also a member of the Festivals Edinburgh Environmental Sustainability Working Group, which looks to identify wider city challenges and advocate for collective change.

As in other areas of our work, we're seeking input from external partners to ensure we're taking the right steps, including a research project with GoCodeGreen to examine our move to digital, to ensure paper reduction does not create a greater environmental impact elsewhere. In February, as part of our Fringe Forest project, a group of Fringe Society staff worked with Caledonian Horticulture to plant 75 trees in Inverleith

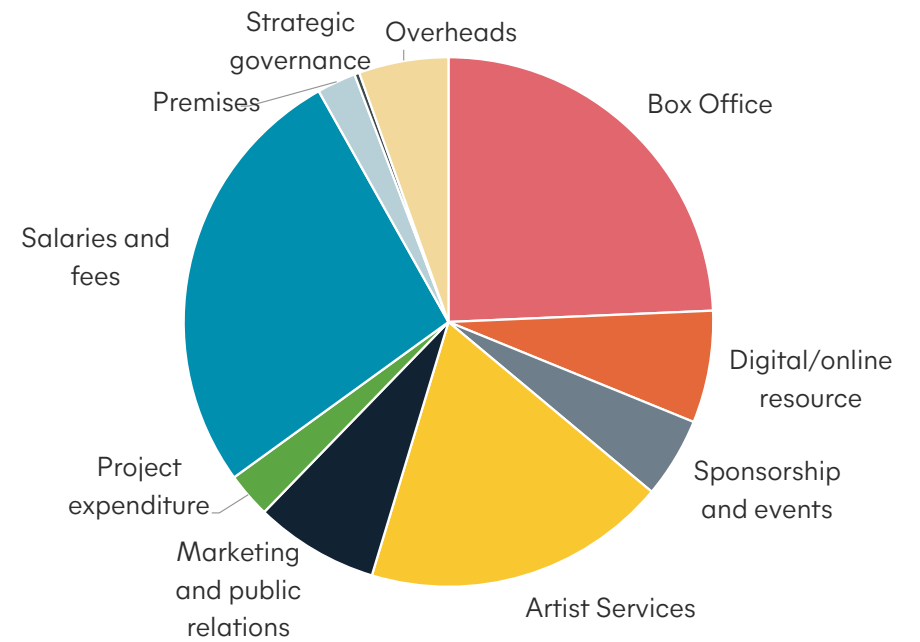


Park, the first step towards planting 75,000 trees to offset the festival's carbon footprint. The project's focus is on planting the right trees in the right places at the right time, with emphasis on establishing trees that will survive, and thrive, in the long term.

At Fringe Central, we hosted three sustainability themed events as well as our traditional Swap Shop and paper recycling services at the end of the festival. Three 12-yard skips were filled with paper recycling between 27 and 29 August.



Total income: £5,504,260



Total expenditure: £6,133,562

Income and expenditure

The Fringe Society's income is derived in large part from delivery of the festival, and we are committed to ensuring participation is affordable for artists and audiences. We are enormously grateful to our sponsors for helping ensure the Fringe Society can continue to provide all of its necessary services to artists and audiences, and to the City of Edinburgh Council for their continued annual support.

Delivery of the street events in 2023 would not have been possible without additional funding from EventScotland and the City of Edinburgh Council. We would also like to thank the Scottish Government for their support via the Platforms for Creative Excellence (PlaCE) programme and their ongoing investment in Made in Scotland through the Edinburgh Festivals EXPO fund. Our thanks to Scottish Enterprise for their support in working towards our Digital transformation goals.

We make special mention of the £7mn capital investment announced this year by UK Government, the first time in our 76-year history that we have tangible acknowledgement of the vital role of the Edinburgh Fringe in the cultural ecology of all of the UK:

“As one of the best-known festivals across the world, the UK Government recognises the significant contribution the Fringe provides in not just supporting performers and artists, but in promoting Scotland on the international stage and showcasing the UK as the premier destination for cultural and creative industries.”

The recognition from UK Government through capital funding is an important milestone, but is only one part of the ambition for long-term investment, support and acknowledgement that the overall Fringe project needs to reinvent itself for a thriving and sustainable future.

Other income includes donations, rental income, Gift Aid and a management fee from our trading subsidiary. The majority of our expenditure goes on providing services and infrastructure, staffing the Society, delivering our iconic street events, marketing the Fringe in its entirety and the range of services and support offered to artists, industry and media throughout the year.

While Fringe 2023 felt stronger than it has since the pandemic, the Fringe Society – like much of the arts sector – continues to run at a loss, while providing the highest quality services to artists and audiences. Please support us in any way you can to keep this amazing festival alive.

A closing note from the Chair

Around this time last year, in my closing note for the Fringe Society's review of 2022, I outlined the steps the Society had taken in response to a mass feedback drive initiated post-Fringe. The team had set out to gather input from across the Fringe landscape – from artists, audience members, venues, workers, arts industry and media – following a severely disruptive couple of years, in the hope of charting a more stable course onwards. That exercise garnered more than 10,000 responses – an incredible result that was foundational in shaping plans for the year ahead.

Those plans helped support a Fringe that was, if not back to full strength, at least fighting fit – something that's borne out by the achievements and successes collected in this review. On behalf of the Fringe Society's Board of Directors, I'd like to thank Shona and her team for their sterling work this year, in doing so much to help us feel, collectively, that the Fringe is back on surer ground.

Against this more optimistic backdrop, and with a little less fanfare, this year's post-festival surveys were conducted as normal. The response has been staggering: more than 19,000 people have responded to the audience survey alone, with the others still being tallied up at the time of writing. The scale of this response reflects how important the Fringe is to so many people, and how the conversation does not end with a given year's festival, but develops year after year. It also illustrates one of the Society's trickier tasks – with input from 19,000 voices, it's impossible to undertake any action that will please everyone. All we can do – and what the Society continues to do – is work to support the best interests of the festival, and of the artists and audiences who make it happen.

Benny Higgins
Chair of the Board



**Fill yer
boots!**

Thank you

The Fringe Society is a registered charity and relies on the financial and strategic support of our partners and sponsors, and the generosity of our Angels, Patrons, Friends and supporters.

Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped us in 2023 – without you none of the work covered in this review would have been possible.

Sponsors

Belhaven Brewery
Cirrus Logic
Edinburgh Gin
Johnnie Walker Princes Street
Playbill
TikTok

Partners

Edinburgh University Festivals Team
Equ
EssenceMediacom
Fest
Jack Arts
Leith
The List
Loop Agencies
Out of Hand
PPL / PRS
Red61
The Skinny
Tactuum
Unique Events
Virgin Hotel Edinburgh

Community and access partners

Baillie Gifford
Balfour Beatty

Public funding

British Council
City of Edinburgh Council
Culture & Business Fund Scotland
Department for Digital, Culture,
Media and Sport
EventScotland
EXPO
PlaCE
Scottish Enterprise
Screen Scotland

Fringe Central supporters

Butta Burger
Health in Mind
Irn Bru
Liquid Death
Tunnock's

Trusts

The Backstage Trust
Fleabag Support Fund
The Northwood Charitable Trust

Special thanks to

Christopher L Eisgruber and
Lori A Martin
Nick and Julie Gould
All our Angels, Patrons and Friends.



**“What happens at this festival has
a huge impact on the arts across
the world.”**

– Phoebe Waller-Bridge

