

Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Forty-eighth Annual General Meeting of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd

Company Number: SC046605

Scottish Charity Number: SC002995

Date: Tuesday 22 August 2017 at 12:30pm

Venue: Playfair Hall, Royal College of Surgeons, Nicolson Street, Edinburgh

Present

Tim O'Shea (Chair)

Anthony Alderson (Vice Chair)

Fiona Davis

Judith Doherty

Richard Lloyd

Luke Meredith

Matt Panesh

Kate Smurthwaite

Richard Wiseman

Collin Wood

In attendance

Fiona Carr (Development Manager)

Jane Colton (Box Office Manager)

Helen Darling (EA to Chief Executive) (Minutes)

Oliver Davies (Head of Marketing, PR & Sponsorship)

Lyndsey Jackson (Head of Operations)

Brigid Kennedy (Marketing and Advertising Coordinator)

Matt Lord (Participant Support Officer)

Michelle Mangan (Senior PR and Marketing Manager)

Shona McCarthy (Chief Executive)

Andy Meldrum (Street Events Manager)

Fiona Payne (Designer)

John Pettie (Technical Project Manager)

Lyndsey McLean (Community Engagement and Access Manager)

Dani Rae (Head of Participant Services, Maternity Cover)

Liam Upton (Media Manager)

Membership

Nick Awde

Tomek Borkowy

Deborah Crewe

Thom Dibdin

JD Henshaw

James Seabright

Ged Welch

Jonathan Holloway

Frank Galbraith

Hils Jago

Margaret McKay

Marlene Zwickler

Xela Batchelder

Public

Elizabeth Ashcroft

Lorna Brain

Alice Boyd

Muriel Cassie

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Sally Cowling
Ted Donavan
Brian Ferguson
Pete Forman
Stephen Graham
Andrew Girvan
Julie Hercik
Alan Ireby
David Jarman
Hartley Kemp
Kent Lawson
Jose Machejo

Philip Miller
Alex Perry
Martin Powell
Elaine Pritchard
Andrew Quinn
Papri Siri Raman
Stewart Reid
Christopher Richardson
Craig Slade
David Southern
Robin Strapp
Alan Woolfe

Preamble

The Chair welcomed Fringe Society members and members of the public to the AGM and explained that formal proceedings would be covered first from the agenda, followed by an introduction and a brief review of the year, followed by Guest speaker Adam McVey, Edinburgh Council and then an informal session after the conclusion of formal business.

The Board of Directors introduced themselves.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from Board members Susan Morrison and Pip Utton.

Notice

The Notice convening the meeting was taken as read. The Chair reminded any Members who had yet to vote in the election to do so immediately.

Minutes of the 2016 Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 2016 Annual General Meeting were taken as read and approved with no alterations. This motion was proposed and seconded.

Decision: **The minutes of the 2016 AGM were unanimously approved. Proposed by Jed Walsh and seconded by Martin Powell.**

Accounts

Copies of the 2016 accounts had been made available and the Chair invited Shona McCarthy, Company Secretary of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society to present the 2017 accounts.

Shona invited Lyndsey Jackson, Head of Operations to speak about the Accounts. Lyndsey noted that the full accounts were not provided due to a scanning issue. Full accounts would be made available

online. The accounts have been reformatted in line with new guidelines for charity accounting, the aim of which is to provide clearer allocation of costs and indication of key risks in the organisation to make it easier and clearer for members to evaluate the position of the organisation. The new format also outlines the Fringe Society's ambitions and key performance indicators. Lyndsey noted that last year's Fringe, was a huge success. The Fringe distributed nearly 2.5 million tickets. The Fringe Society made significant investment in the Fringe Application which was bought last year. Designated allocation for access Fringe strategy costs. The majority of the Society's income was from commissions, booking fees and registration fees associated to the box office, advertising and associated publications, donations, sponsorship and events, and the majority of our expenditure went on the delivery of services such as Box Office services, producing the programme and digital services of the website.

The Chair opened the floor to questions of a financial nature. There were no questions.

Decision: **The accounts were unanimously adopted. Proposed by Anthony Alderson and seconded by JD Henshaw.**

Appointment of Auditors

The Chair informed those in attendance of the Board's proposal at the 2016 AGM to tender for the appointment of the auditors. In line with good financial practice, the Society undertook a competitive tendering process. As a result of this process, the Board recommend Henderson Loggie due to their comprehensive skillset, and solid record of service in comparable organisations. They had three very positive references, clear understanding of the charitable arts sector alongside the knowledge of organisations with similar complexity. The Society also made a significant saving by appointing them.

The Chair opened the floor for questions of a financial nature. There were no questions.

Decision: **Henderson Loggie were appointed as auditors. Proposed by Thom Dibden and seconded by Martin Powell.**

The official business was concluded at this point.

Chief Executive's Report

The Chair invited the Chief Executive to give a brief update on the Fringe Society's activities over the past 12 months.

Shona highlighted the Fringe Society's Annual Review, a public document outlining the work of the Society over the previous financial year. 2016 was a very good year for the Fringe Society and for the Festival Fringe. Attendance surpassed the previous year, ticketed shows were up 7.7% and just under 2.5 million tickets sold. The Society renewed a major partnership with Virgin Money and Virgin Money will be a partner of the Fringe particularly the street events for the next three years.

Access Fringe

The Society developed the Access Fringe last year and recruited a new position of Community Engagement and Access Manager. The new permanent positive is a long-term commitment to ensure the Society is working towards removing barriers to participation, and is delivered in partnership with many organisations across Scotland and the UK.

The Fringe Society once again worked closely with Fringe venues to offer access to free tickets to children and young people in and around the City of Edinburgh Council Corporate Parenting department. In 2016, 1,038 Fringe shows took part in the offer. Based on feedback from partners and an evaluation carried out by Culture Republic in 2015, we opened the scheme in 2017 to organisations in the children and families network of the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisation's Council (EVOC) and other groups of at risk and vulnerable young people. This made the scheme available to social workers, families and youth organisations that work with at risk and vulnerable young people. This broadened the scheme significantly.

Euan's Guide awarded Fringe Central (ECCI 2016) the Spirit of Inclusion award in recognition of the efforts the Society made to be as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Schools Poster Competition

The Fringe Schools Poster Competition 2017 was a huge success, with the number of entries increased by 11% and 62% increase in the number of participating schools. The competition was restructured as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Fringe, and the priorities identified within the Access Fringe strategy regarding young people. Three winning images became the three front covers of the Fringe programme. It is an increasingly good way to engage with schools and young people across the country.

2017 saw the introduction of a champion artist who acted as a figurehead for the competition and delivered a workshop for teachers, a schools' workshop and was on the judging panel. The champion artist in 2017 was John Bishop, aka, The Grey Earl.

Also new for 2017, a Creative Stars Award in partnership with Dynamic Earth was awarded to the lunchtime art club at Castlebrae Community High School. Seven pupils collaborated to create a poster design that captures the movement and shapes of performers at the Fringe.

World Fringe Day

The inaugural World Fringe Day on 11 July 2017 celebrated Edinburgh as the birthplace of the fringe and its connection to fringes around the world. Over 100 of the festivals connected pro-actively and engaged with the opportunity of World Fringe Day. The project had a 34 million people reach through Twitter, social media, Facebook, etc. Alongside the international platform was a thank you to the city, which was very successful and well received. The Society gifted £47,754 of Fringe Days Out experiences to 26 charities and community groups across the city. Fringe Days Out consisted of £60 of Fringe vouchers for a family and £12 for an individual, and included family and adult bus passes for Lothian Buses.

Fringe World Congress

Fringe World Congress will return to Edinburgh next year which is a bi-Annual mechanism for connecting with other Fringe festivals around the world.

Shona paid tribute to the team that have been through immense changes over the last year, risen to the challenge and delivered over and above especially Lyndsey Jackson and Dani Rae, Head of Participant Services (Maternity Cover). Shona said the Fringe staff work really hard to provide excellent services and will continue to do the best possible.

The Chair thanked Shona and agreed that the Fringe Society provides excellent support and has an exceptional relationship with the city and the Council. The Chair thanked Shona for her report and concluded the formal business.

The Chair introduced the guest speaker Adam McVey, Council Leader.

Adam McVey, Council Leader

The Chair introduced Adam McVey, Council Leader. Adam introduced himself as the new Council Leader since June 2017, and highlighted that he had himself worked at the Fringe Society as part of the Street Events team. He spoke for 10 minutes on the value of the fringe to the city, the challenges the council faces in balancing resident and visitor needs, and the world stage the Festival City offers to Edinburgh.

The Chair thanked Adam for his excellent presentation and said the Fringe benefited from the special relationship with the City and appreciate the contributions of the Council. The Chair expressed his appreciation of the Fringe staff especially the Chief Executive and Lyndsey Jackson. The members applauded the members of the Fringe Board and Fringe Society.

The Chair opened the meeting to an informal question and answer session.

Open Session

Question: Marlene Zwickler (member) requested the Board to look at re-instating Fringe Sunday which is an open Fringe day for everybody. Fringe Sunday was an open event that brought people together and offered free performances on the Meadows. It involved a huge amount of administration and staging.

Response: The Chair asked the Chief Executive to respond. Shona confirmed it was before her time and that, while she understood it was a complex event, the principle of Fringe Sunday would align with the Fringe Society's Access Fringe strategy. Shona highlighted the Fringe Days Out ticket giveaway as a valuable audience development and engagement resource. Shona asked Lyndsey to offer further clarification. The concept of Fringe Sunday was quite important but there are many alternatives, including street events, access and community engagement work and ticket initiatives to support access. The fundamental principle at the heart of access strategy is making sure that the people of the city have something that they can access at little or no cost on their doorstep.

The Chair invited comments from members on Fringe Sunday. One member, an event manager for 27 years, said Fringe Sunday was interesting but very difficult to operate. He suggested venues offer a free day for the Edinburgh audience, perhaps the first day of the Fringe., before the two for one days. Anthony Alderson, Board member, thought that was a helpful suggestion. Members present commented that Fringe Sunday was stopped because the costs of running a large event on the meadows for half a day required extensive costs such as security, costs of toilets, and stage costs. When the sponsor removed their resources, the Fringe team at the time felt it was too expensive to spend on a half day. The Society has limited funds to deliver its activities so should think carefully about how it can support access to the fringe.

Another member pointed out since Fringe Sunday ceased to exist there has been an increase in free events. Edinburgh citizens are aware of free shows. Anthony added that the Council have also been hugely supportive in providing access to the Royal Mile that didn't exist before.

Question: Dave Southern (Street Performer) introduced himself as a Street Performer who performs on a unicycle. His first Edinburgh Fringe Festival as a street performer was in 1988. He wanted to say a big thank you and acknowledged it was a fantastic festival. He also thanked the street events team. He raised the issue of the City of Edinburgh Council putting up signs banning busking during specific hours in specific parts of the city. He asked for the Fringe Society's support in working with the Council to find solutions.

Response: The Chair thanked the member for his positive affirmation of the Society. In terms of his question about signage, the Board discussed the issue at the Board meeting that morning. He assured the member that the Society was keen to work with the Council and civil authorities to ensure that any advice or guidance to street performers is given in an appropriate manner. Dani Rae, Head of Participant Services, informed the member that the Society had a conversation with the Council about the wording of the sign. The Council informed the Society that the signs go up at the request of the residents and businesses around these areas. The Fringe Society would continue to work further to make sure the working is more understanding of the city's infrastructure.

Dave clarified he had no issues with the wording of the signs. The signs were stopping something that is a free and legal thing to do. Dani agreed to work with him and other street artists to look at ways of managing the situation so residents are not put under pressure.

Question: Alan Ireby introduced himself as the longest serving participant having been in the Fringe shows since 1960. He said the Fringe, as the leading arts festival for theatre, dance music, opera is slowly but surely being suffocated by the invasion of stand-up comedy. The Fringe is a free-for-all market. He feared would lose its theatrical identity due to the huge increase in stand-up.

The Chair invited a response from the floor.

Response: Thom Dibden (a journalist) answered Alan's question. Thom outlined his interest in the statistics of the fringe and commented that the percentage of stand-up comedy has remained static over recent years, and it was at least ten years since stand-up comedy took over theatre. Anthony added we are committed to being open access and would in no way cap sections of the programme. Kate Smurthwaite, Board member, pointed out two things. Comedy started to overtake theatre in terms of the number of shows at the Fringe, over that period, the definition of stand-up comedy has broadened enormously. Secondly, there may be a bias towards comedy that's driven by finance as it's more affordable to do stand-up without a costly production.

Jonathan Holloway (member) commented that he felt a profound change and that he was not an atypical fringe audience member; theatre lovers, assertive in their choices, high ticket buyers who do a lot of planning and want to see theatre, and he (and they) are increasingly frustrated that theatre seems to have been relegated to the afternoons.

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Question: Alice Boyd who is in Edinburgh carrying out a dissertation on sustainability at the Fringe asked how is the Fringe Society is promoting environmental sustainability?

Response: Shona responded that at the Fringe Society we have a very strong green policy. We look at and consider the number of programmes produced every year and have been reducing them year on year as demand moves very much to digital devices. We have a massive recycling day at the end of every Fringe festival. We are absolutely committed to environmentally friendly causes. Shona asked Lyndsey if she wanted to add anything. Lyndsey confirmed the Society work with Creative Carbon Scotland to make sure that there are facilities in place such as Recycle Day and we discourage people from unnecessary printing. We are a part of the Green Venue Initiatives.

Question: Tomek Borkowy (member) congratulated Shona and her team on a successful fringe. He raised the issue of helping artists make money or reduce their losses. He pointed out the city and the region make £300M according to the impact study.

Response: Anthony responded by saying the cost of accommodation is high and it is a difficult issue for the Board to address. For many years there has been a common misconception that there are people who are making lots of money but this is not true and that turnover of organisations is not profit.

Tomek reiterated that everyone not involved in the Fringe is making money. Tomek commented that accommodation costs are enormous, and the university has increased costs by 400% over the years, and that this reflected a 'greedy' approach by the university. The Chair pointed out he was present as Chair of the Board but in his role as Principle of the University of Edinburgh, he took great exception to the rude, inappropriate and inaccurate remark. Tomek apologised.

Shona observed that it is untrue to say that artists and performers do not make any money or that money is the only incentive for participation. They come for different reasons, including a sense of community and ability to claim they performed at the Fringe. The cost of the infrastructure is high and the Society are in conversation with organisations to look at the cost of accommodation and transport infrastructure so as much money as possible can be returned to artists.

Matt Panesh, Board member noted he has in some years lost a few thousand pounds but he felt it was an investment given the exposure he can receive at the Fringe. This is not affordable for all performers and more should be done to support low income artists.

Kate Smurthwaite, Board member pointed out that there are some performers who come to the Fringe and hope to break even, some who do not come to make money and some who do not expect to lose as much as they do. The Fringe Society cannot magically solve the problem and suddenly make everybody reduce the cost of accommodation. A lot of performers come to the Fringe not fully understanding the model and the structure. Kate suggested the Society can do more in terms of increasing transparency in communication so people have a much clearer and fairer idea of what to expect when they come to the Fringe.

Any other business

There was no further business to discuss. The Chair thanked all those present for their attendance and engagement and declared the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM closed.