

Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

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

Company Number: SC046605

Scottish Charity Number: SC002995

Date: Tuesday 23 August 2016 at 12.30pm

Venue: Playfair Hall, RCSEd, Nicolson Street, Edinburgh

Present

Tim O'Shea (Chair)

Anthony Alderson

Judith Doherty

Harry Gooch

Richard Lloyd

Luke Meredith

Gareth Morinan

Matt Panesh

Kate Smurthwaite

Richard Wiseman

Charlie Wood

Collin Wood

In attendance

Elizabeth Burchell (Head of Marketing & Sponsorship)

Jane Colton (Box Office Manager)

Rachael Cowie (Marketing & Sponsorship Assistant)

Sarah Jane Dooley (Development Officer)

Navida Galbraith (Office Manager)

Lyndsey Jackson (Head of Operations)

Brigid Kennedy (Marketing & Advertising Coordinator)

Kevin Kimber (Venues & Companies Manager)

Michelle Mangan (Senior PR & Marketing Manager)

Shona McCarthy (Chief Executive)

Lyndsey McLean (Community Engagement & Access Manager)

Fiona Payne (Designer)

Rachel Sanger (Head of Participant Services)

Louise Thomson (Executive Assistant) (Minutes)

Russell Tullo (Box Office Customer Services Coordinator)

Membership

Xela Batchelder

Sharon Burgess

Ali Day

Thom Dibdin

Pete Forman

Hils Jago

David Jarman

Kent Lawson

Sally Lloyd

Jen McGregor

David O'Donoghue

Alex Perry

Martin Powell

Christopher Richardson

James Seabright

Barrie Taylor

Allan Woolfe

Celia Wrighton

Marlene Zwickler

Minutes

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Public

Kelly Adams
Andrew Anderson
Steve Anderson
Elizabeth Ashcroft
Nick Awde
Marissa Brown
Muriel Cassie
Ted Donovan
Brian Ferguson
Steve Gove
Ale Hedlund

JD Henshaw
Alan Ireby
Maeve Kirk
Caitlin Messinger
Phil Miller
Charles Pamment
Elene Pritchard
Stewart Reid
Robin Strapp
Abbie Woolanin
Celia Wrighton

Preamble

The Chair welcomed Fringe Society members and members of the public to the AGM explaining that formal proceedings would be covered first from the agenda followed by a speech from new Chief Executive Shona McCarthy and then an informal question and answer session after the conclusion of formal business. The Board of Directors introduced themselves.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from Board Members Fiona Davis, 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 2015 Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 2015 Annual General Meeting were taken as read and approved with no alterations. This motion was proposed by Allan Woolfe and seconded by Martin Powell.

Decision: The minutes of the 2015 AGM were unanimously approved.

Accounts

Copies of the 2015 accounts had been made available and the Chair opened the floor to questions of a financial nature. There were no questions.

The adoption of the accounts was proposed by Ged Welch and seconded by Anthony Alderson.

Decision: The accounts were unanimously adopted.

Appointment of Auditors

The Chair explained that, in line with good financial practice, the Society would be undertaking a tendering process for an auditor following the 2016/17 financial cycle. The Board's recommendation would be presented at the 2017 AGM.

Shona McCarthy's inaugural speech

The Chair invited the Chief Executive to introduce herself to those present before giving a summary of the past year's activities.

The Chief Executive gave a brief introduction to her background, touching on her experience of growing up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, and the inspiration this gave her to look outward and see culture and creativity as a connecting force. She spoke about her past work experience which included Cinemagic, Foyle Film Festival, NI Film Council and the British Council. She highlighted her significant areas of interest, including:

- ensuring that the core business of the Society in underpinning and supporting Fringe performers, venues and audiences continues to deliver, improve, refine and evolve;
- exploring the Open Access principle and how it is preserved;
- the relationship of the Fringe to the city, to Scotland and to the UK, how it contributes to the wider cultural innovation and production and the pathways for people to be part of it;
- the internationalism of the Fringe;
- working more closely with other festivals and cultural providers to ensure that collectively we are responding to changing context and times and working together for the greater good.

The Chief Executive then went on to mention some of the highlights of 2016 so far.

Access

The Society continued to work to remove barriers to participation for both participants and audience. Work in this area included:

- the creation of a new permanent position of Community Engagement and Access Manager;
- working with Attitude is Everything as an Attitude Champion;
- developing a Venue Access Toolkit to help venues develop best practice in terms of their approach to accessibility;
- developing an online training course for Society and venue staff to explore issues in relation to inclusion and to offer insight into customer service best practise, empowering staff to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

Roadshows and events

The Society travelled extensively in 2015/16 promoting the Fringe to audiences and participants. The Fringe continues to become more and more international, with 41 countries represented in 2016 (there were 39 in 2015). Roadshows took place in:

- UK – London, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Manchester, Brighton;
- Australia – Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide;
- Argentina;
- Chile;
- USA;
- Germany;
- Czech Republic.

Fringe Central and arts industry

Fringe Central found a new home in 2016 at the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation on Infirmary Street. Sam Wills (The Boy with Tape on his Face) gave an inspiring and entertaining welcome address. The Fringe Central programme for 2016 includes over 106 events with themes covering Health and Wellbeing, Making the Most of Your Fringe, and Breaking Down Barriers. Partners have included among many others Black Theatre Live, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, National Autistic Society, Creative Carbon Scotland, Euan's Guide, Playwright's Studio Scotland, and Independent Theatre Council. 45 rehearsals have been facilitated (up from 12 in 2015) and 776 participants attended the Meet the Media event.

We continued to partner with the British Council to host 15 Emerging Producers from across the UK. The Arts Industry office has so far spoken to over 400 individual shows about their work and their professional development post-Fringe.

This year we have accredited media from 17 countries so far including Nigeria, Pakistan, New Zealand, Egypt, South Korea, Canada and the US.

There has been extensive coverage of the Fringe in media outlets around the world. The Chief Executive has given interviews with New York Times, Irish Times, Washington Post, Korean TV, Radio Toronto, The Stage, Irish News, BBC and all major Scottish media outlets.

Sponsorship

The Society maintains excellent relationships with key sponsors:

- Virgin Money – 3rd year of three-year contract;
- Caledonian Brewery (Heineken) – 1st year of three-year contract;
- Contini – year two of a four-year contract taking the partnership to 2018.

In 2016, we also welcomed Edlets, Holiday Cottages and Actavo (an event solutions company) as partners.

Development

The interest in the Friends of the Fringe scheme continues to grow both from audiences and performers who choose to include their performance in the Friends 2for1 offer. The scheme has increased hugely in 3 years from 2,940 Friends in 2013 to 8,065 in 2016 (as of 18 August 2016). Friends continue to buy significantly more tickets than other ticket buyers.

Membership

There are 687 members in total in the electorate – an increase from 496 members last year.

The formal business of the meeting was concluded and the Chair opened the meeting to an informal question and answer session.

Open session

Andrew Anderson (non-member) brought up the cancellation of an Israeli show at the 2014 Fringe, referring to the incident as a shameful blot on Fringe history and expressed his opinion that the situation hadn't been taken on board by the Society. He was pleased that an Israeli show in 2016 had gone ahead but felt that the Society's statement on freedom of speech and open access was bland and should commit to going further.

The Chair noted that the situation had been taken very seriously. He confirmed the Society's unambiguous commitment to freedom of speech and added that the Society would always defend the right of both performers and protestors.

Charlie Wood noted that this was expected to be an ongoing issue and discussion and that the Society would need to come to a decision as to what 'defend' actually means.

James Seabright (member) began by congratulating the Chief Executive and her team on the 2016 Fringe thus far. He asked whether there had been any thought on changing the dates of the Fringe so that it would take place before the Edinburgh International Festival, before the Scottish schools return after the summer break. Mr Seabright also felt that national press coverage of the Fringe was diminishing.

The Chief Executive noted that evidence showed both the Fringe and International Festival had benefitted from the alignment of their dates, and that EFFS was looking at the school dates question.

Elizabeth Burchell confirmed that as part of the Society's education strategy, research was being conducted in this area. With regard to Mr Seabright's second point, she noted that the number of reviews, both from members of the public and the profession, had increased.

Jen McGregor (member) mentioned the 'Fringe Whistleblower' website which highlighted allegations of poor working conditions for temporary staff at Fringe venues. She asked whether the Society could be more involved in these issues.

The Chief Executive noted that the Society itself is an accredited living wage employer and Disability Confident employer. She noted that BECTU were aware of the website and it was hoped that its contributors would engage in a discussion.

Lyndsey Jackson noted that while the Society encourages venues to become living wage employers, its open access principle means it does not have power to enforce this.

Rachel Sanger noted that the Participant Services team had undertaken and would continue to undertake communications around best practice and encouraging venues to sign up to the Society's best practice charter.

David Jarman (member) enquired as to how ECCI had worked as a venue for Fringe Central.

The Chief Executive noted that feedback had been positive with participants spending a lot of time at Fringe Central networking and using the facilities.

The Chair also pointed out that the ECCI had the best energy efficiency rating of any 18th century building in the UK.

Hils Jago (member) expressed her concern around health and safety at some venues. She felt that old buildings were having too many people admitted, potentially compromising the safety of guests and staff.

The Chief Executive confirmed that public safety was key, however the Society does not manage venues and could only encourage and give support. She noted that the Society works closely with the City of Edinburgh Council and emergency services to ensure public safety during the Fringe.

Rachel Sanger noted that she would be happy to pass on contact details.

Christopher Richardson (member) wished to note Malcolm Kennedy's resignation from City of Edinburgh Council's licensing section and thank him for his contribution.

There was no further business to discuss and the Chair declared the AGM closed.