



Edinburgh
International
Book Festival



Chair of the Board of Trustees
Candidate information pack



Introduction

Thank you for your interest in chairing the Board of Trustees of the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

The Book Festival is a global showcase for artists, writers and thinkers. It enables the greatest diversity of voices to be heard by the broadest audience, whilst continuing to be rooted in the rich literary heritage of Scotland, and Edinburgh, the founding UNESCO City of Literature.

The Book Festival aims to open and broaden conversations: it creates spaces for nuanced public discussion, where ideas develop and are exchanged. Those spaces exist at the summer festival and beyond: the Book Festival works year-round alongside partners in local communities - with schools, libraries, prisons, hospitals, and other community hubs.

We are looking for a dynamic and visionary person with a passion for words, literature and ideas, to lead the Board, inspire the staff team, and galvanise external support whilst ensuring a financially and operationally robust organisation.

Since 1983, the Book Festival has welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors to engage with the world's greatest and emerging writers, thinkers, artists, and performers. Now, led by recently appointed Director Jenny Niven, the Book Festival has renewed its vision and strategy and is set to move into its new home: the Edinburgh Futures Institute, in the heart of the Scottish capital. The successful candidate will be at the centre of what happens next: 2024 is an exciting time to become Chair.

Mary Robson
Chair, Appointment Committee



About the Edinburgh International Book Festival

Edinburgh International Book Festival is a democratic, inclusive celebration of creativity, imagination and ideas, which ignites exchange, empowers audiences and fosters human connection. We create spaces for critical thinking and nuanced debate across cultural, ethical and political issues, and shape interactive experiences with the world's finest writers and thinkers. We want everyone who joins us to feel safe to express themselves and take ambitious leaps of thought in a climate of mutual respect.

We're outward looking and internationalist in our approach. We introduce audiences to first class work from around the world, supporting empathy and understanding, and celebrating Scotland's writers within the global context.

We hold a unique position in the literature and publishing ecosystem where the cultural and commercial meet, creating opportunities for writers at every stage of their careers from booksales to professional development to creative encounters with other artists. We are a hub and marketplace for industry professionals and create hundreds of fairly paid jobs, and opportunities for local suppliers and partners.

We also have a broad programme of inspiring and innovative events for schools, and children with their families. We're committed to reaching those who face barriers to be part of the Book Festival, integrating creative learning and community engagement, and giving agency to people not always heard in cultural spaces.





Background

The Book Festival was founded in 1983 when around 80 events took place in a marquee in Charlotte Square Gardens. By 2019, we were still in the Gardens but one marquee had evolved into a whole village of tents, hosting a programme of over 900 events with authors from across the world.

With the global pandemic, like everyone else, our world changed. We responded quickly and in August 2020, we staged an acclaimed digital Book Festival, where writers came together and thousands of people from across the world gathered and interacted in real-time chatrooms and live Q&As. 2021 to 2023 saw more transformation: a long-term strategic partnership with the University of Edinburgh enabled us to stage hybrid festivals on a new site at the Edinburgh College of Art.

In 2023, we also welcomed a new Director, Jenny Niven, whose bold vision will lead us through the next period of transition with optimism and positivity. From 2024 we will be in a new home at the Edinburgh Futures Institute, a landmark development at the University. Our new venue offers us the possibility of multi-disciplinary collaborations and placemaking, and building new experiences for writers, audiences and partners in the physical and digital space. Growing and diversifying audiences is a key strategic priority - it's vital to our success and stability, and to widening the conversations we create.





Finances

After a period of instability caused by the pandemic, we're regaining organisational and financial equilibrium and are investing in the next phase of our development.

In 2022, our ticket and booksales were substantially lower than forecast, leading to a challenging reassessment of our operational and financial model. We had to make some difficult decisions in acknowledgement of the ongoing uncertainty as we emerged from the pandemic, and to mitigate the risks to our stability. These included restructuring our team, reducing the scale of our digital activity and working with an external partner to deliver our booksales. Although the circumstances were challenging, the 2023 Festival was a critical and commercial success. This has given us the security to invest in our new festival model at Edinburgh Futures Institute and to move forward with confidence. We continue to aim for best practice in all aspects of our operation, from sustainability to staff development and support and will also invest in our team and organisation to assist this.

Our most recent report and accounts (2022) can be found [here](#).





The role

As the Book Festival completes its relocation to Edinburgh Futures Institute and begins an exciting new chapter with a new Director, the Appointment Committee is seeking a visionary, dedicated and capable Chair with a demonstrable passion for words, literature, and ideas. They will lead the Board, inspire the team, and galvanise external support whilst ensuring a financially and operationally robust organisation.



Responsibilities

The Chair's responsibilities are as follows.

Strategic leadership

- Provide leadership to the charity and its Board, ensuring that it fulfils its charitable purpose as defined in its governing document, delivering maximum impact for its beneficiaries.
- Ensure that the organisation has an inspiring and relevant vision and lead the Board to work with the Director on setting the future direction.
- Ensure that the Board and Executive fulfil their duties to ensure the sound financial health of the organisation through appropriate systems and controls.
- Ensure that the Board regularly reviews major risks and opportunities and satisfies itself that systems are in place to take advantage of opportunities and manage and mitigate the risks.





External relations

- Act as an ambassador, networker, and spokesperson on behalf of Edinburgh International Book Festival, enhancing its reputation nationally and internationally.
- Assist in maintaining and developing beneficial relationships with existing and potential stakeholders such as authors, publishers, audiences, local communities, public sector funders such as Creative Scotland, commercial sponsors, individual donors, the University of Edinburgh and others.
- Maintain a visible and dynamic presence throughout the Festival, actively contributing to its success.
- Support the Director in stewarding the Festival's reputation, identifying potential risks, and using influence where appropriate and beneficial.

Governance

- Ensure that the highest standards of charity governance and ethical/professional behaviour are maintained across the organisation.
- Chair Board meetings effectively and efficiently, bringing impartiality and objectivity to the decision-making process. With the Director, ensure that all matters requiring Board input and/or scrutiny are brought to the Board's attention in a timely manner, that Board members are encouraged to contribute to debate and make decisions within appropriate parameters, and that Board decisions are accurately recorded and actioned.
- Ensure that the diversity and breadth of skills and experience of Trustees is commensurate with the requirements of the organisation and fulfils the organisation's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; participate in or delegate recruitment for Trustee appointments.
- Develop the knowledge and capability of the Board of Trustees to ensure that all Trustees can contribute as effectively as possible.
- Ensure that the performance of Trustees and the Board are annually appraised to ensure Trustees fulfil their duties and responsibilities for the effective governance of the charity.
- Foster and maintain constructive relationships with and between the Trustees, ensuring that the Board takes collective ownership, acting in the best long-term interests of the charity.

Relationship with the Director

- Establish and build a strong, supportive and effective working relationship with the Director; agree appropriate objectives and key indicators of performance and hold them to account; conduct annual performance and remuneration reviews for the Director in consultation with the other Trustees.
- Ensure that the Director has the opportunity for professional development and has appropriate external professional support.



The person

The ideal candidate will demonstrate the following personal qualities, skills and experience:

Personal qualities

- A strong and visible passion for and commitment to all strands of the Festival's programme, including its inclusive education and community work, and its pre-eminent role as a global showcase for artists, writers and thinkers, enabling the greatest diversity of voices to be heard by the broadest audiences.
- Authority and credibility; they are a respected figure with a strong public profile in their professional lives and beyond and possess polished and articulate public speaking skills.
- Political and commercial intelligence, with sound independent judgement, common sense and diplomacy.
- High standards of personal integrity and respect for others. A proven values-driven, collaborative leadership style.
- A commitment to environmental sustainability and maintaining the Festival's status as an environmentally responsible festival.
- A commitment to open discourse and democratic discussion.
- The ability to listen and engage effectively.
- The ability to foster and promote a collaborative team environment.
- Willingness to commit time to the role, including Board and Committee meetings, informal contact with Trustees, team members and stakeholders, and attendance at events.



Skills and experience

- Experience of operating at a senior strategic leadership level within a substantial organisation.
- Track record of significant achievement in their career.
- Proven Board leadership credentials (ideally Chair) and experience of or willingness to learn the specifics of Scottish charity governance.
- Track record of operating in an environment that values equality, diversity, representation and inclusion in the workplace.
- Demonstrated strategic, commercial and financial acumen.
- Substantial experience of external representation, building partnerships and managing stakeholders.
- Ability to communicate confidently and persuasively, and the ability to lead, motivate and collaborate with the Board of Trustees.
- Significant experience of chairing meetings and events.
- Understanding of the political context within which the Festival operates, including the need for advocacy, the decision-making processes of government, the local authority, and the work of other strategic bodies.
- Knowledge of Scotland, the arts, culture and media landscape, and ideally the Scottish literature sector.

Terms

The Chair will serve an initial five-year term, with the potential for the role to be extended for a further three years, at the Board's discretion.

The role is unremunerated, but the Charity will cover reasonable expenses incurred in the fulfilment of the Chair's duties.

How to apply

Please send a CV and a covering letter stating why you think you are suitable for the role of Chair to our recruitment consultant, Helen Sprott, AEM International Limited at hsprott@aeminternational.co.uk. Letters should be no longer than three pages. All applications will be acknowledged.

The deadline for applications is Monday 8 April. Initial meetings with shortlisted candidates will take place during the week of 29 April.

We also ask that you complete our Equality and Diversity monitoring form to help us assess this recruitment process. The form is accessible [here](#). If you need any changes to the application process or wish to submit your application as a video or in an alternative format, we would be happy to support you and accommodate this. Please contact us to make us aware.

If you would like a confidential and informal chat about the role, please contact Helen Sprott at the address above.

Edinburgh International Book Festival is an equal opportunities employer and our work is framed by a commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The Book Festival is a working environment where everyone is treated fairly, and our differences are celebrated as strengths. We encourage applicants with diverse backgrounds and experiences to apply and particularly encourage applications from those backgrounds underrepresented in our industry. If you have any access requirements, please let us know and we will do our best to meet your needs.



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

