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For immediate release

The Edinburgh International Book Festival Launches *Citizen*

The next phase of the Book Festival On The Road

The Edinburgh International Book Festival today announced the next phase of its year-round programme taking the Book Festival On The Road. Following on from the Festival's extremely successful ReimagiNation series across Scotland's five New Towns, *Citizen* is a new long-term creative programme working in partnership with organisations across Edinburgh, listening to people's views about the communities in which they live. Led by Scottish-based writers-in-residence, *Citizen* aims to give a voice to communities, offering residents an opportunity to explore their connection to each other and their relationship to their local area, looking at how local conversations are heard or echoed on a national or global level.

Nick Barley, Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, said "I feel passionately that book festivals are not just about books: they are much-needed forums for public discourse. If we are going to sustain a genuinely inclusive forum for grassroots democratic discussion in Edinburgh, we must reach out more effectively to give everyone the chance to take part. That's why it's so exciting to be able to work with community groups that haven't traditionally been so well represented in the audiences at the August festival. We're also honoured that authors Claire Askew and Eleanor Thom have agreed to join us in creating long-term community partnerships: I can't wait to see what kind of events and stories will develop out of the *Citizen* project."

After an open recruitment process, Claire Askew has been appointed as the *Citizen* Schools Writer-in-Residence and will be working with three secondary schools including Liberton High School and Craigroyston Community High School. Claire is a poet and novelist and her debut novel *All the Hidden*

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT FRANCES SUTTON, PRESS MANAGER:

frances@edbookfest.co.uk / Tel: 0131 718 5654 / Mob: 07841 579481

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Truths featured in the Book Festival programme this year. Eleanor Thom has been appointed as the **Citizen** Community Writer-in-Residence and will be working through North Edinburgh Arts with groups living and working in the North of the city as well as in partnership with WHALE Arts Agency (Wester Hailes) and Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre (Moredun). Eleanor, a novelist (*The Tin-Kin*) and short form fiction writer, will be meeting regularly with local people from a variety of backgrounds and of all ages to hold creative conversations about what being a citizen today means. The writers-in-residence will work with a host of fellow writers, musicians, illustrators and other artists to inspire community members and school pupils to tell their stories of life in their areas, and share their views on community, home and their relationship to the wider world.

Claire Askew commented, “I am absolutely thrilled to have been invited to work on the *Citizen* project, joining the Edinburgh International Book Festival in their ongoing, inspiring work to reach communities across Scotland. The importance of projects that 'twin' educational settings with cultural ones cannot be underestimated: I am excited to work with young people from around Edinburgh to find out how they look at reading, writing and arts events. I'm excited to support them as they take ownership of these things and look at ways to bring their creative expression to a wider audience. I'm looking forward to working in communities where engagement with books and creative writing can be boosted by empowering their young people to spread the word about their own creations and discoveries.”

In collaboration with North Edinburgh Arts, local residents will be invited to join a group of Community Programmers who will work closely with Eleanor Thom and the Book Festival. The group will create events showcasing the conversations to community audiences, and curate a special strand of **Citizen** events at the 2019 Edinburgh International Book Festival, ensuring the voices and concerns of people across the city are heard on the Festival's international stage.

Eleanor Thom said “The most powerful stories are likely happening beyond the geography of the festival and exploring these narratives can transform how we all see our city, ourselves, and others. That's why *Citizen* is important. I'll be asking what kinds of stories people want to hear, as well as listening to the

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stories people want to tell. I'm motivated by my belief that sharing stories can effect change, and I'm excited to be part of making the festival more representative."

The same group will work to create a mini Book Festival to be held in North Edinburgh Arts in May 2020, which responds to the ideas developed across the previous eighteen months of the programme. *Citizen* will continue until August 2021 and will draw in communities in and around Musselburgh with the support of the Brunton Theatre. The Book Festival will share regular updates from these community conversations on social media and at ontheroad.edbookfest.co.uk, enabling more people from the city and beyond to get involved in the discussions.

Kate Wimpres, Director of North Edinburgh Arts said: "We're delighted to be part of this exciting new project bringing artists and communities together. We are sure Eleanor, as North Edinburgh Arts writer in residence, will spark many interesting conversations and inspire creativity among all the users of our venue and beyond. NEA aims to be a place where we can make connections, share ideas, learn together and take creative risks, and this project will contribute directly to those aims, and offer new perspectives for the future."

Citizen is part of Edinburgh International Book Festival On The Road, a series of events and activities around Scotland throughout the year, and is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery and through the PLACE Programme (funded by the Scottish Government, City of Edinburgh Council, and the Edinburgh Festivals, and supported and administered by Creative Scotland).

Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop said: "*Citizen* is a fantastic opportunity to reach communities across Scotland and give them a chance to explore the relationship with the place they live in, building links and connecting 'local' with 'global'. Working in partnership with organisations across Edinburgh and beyond, this programme is sure to stimulate debate and intrigue audiences, raising Scotland's cultural profile on the international stage.

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"The Edinburgh International Book Festival has long been a highlight in the Edinburgh Festivals' calendar, bringing together the world's finest authors and the best of Scotland's creative talent. In the last 10 years the Scottish government has provided more than £1.1 million to the Book Festival through our Expo Fund, and I am now pleased that we are able to provide further support through our recently launched PLACE fund, which will provide an additional £15 million to enhance of all Edinburgh's Festivals over the next five years."

Councillor Donald Wilson, Culture and Communities Convener, said: "For centuries Edinburgh has exported stories to the world, leading to its designation as the first ever UNESCO City of Literature. Since the Book Festival launched 35 years ago, the city has welcomed some of the greatest minds and most interesting writers on the planet to exchange ideas and share their stories with us!

"In turn, this programme represents a unique connection between the city and the world of literature. It will engage communities and groups from all over Edinburgh with the aim of giving local citizens a national and international voice. I'm delighted that through our PLACE programme partnership, the Council is helping the Book Festival celebrate and share the stories of our own people in this creative way."

Edinburgh International Book Festival has received over £1 million from players of People's Postcode Lottery since the partnership started in 2014. Spokesperson Hazel Johnstone from the charities team said: "It's great that people from all walks of life will be able to come together in a creative environment and tell their stories about the communities where they live. It'll be really interesting to see what transpires from the *Citizen* project and I look forward to hearing about it in the coming months."

The 2019 Edinburgh International Book Festival runs from Saturday 10 to Monday 26 August 2019 and the full programme will be announced in June. Further information about the Book Festival, and the *Citizen* programme, can be found at www.edbookfest.co.uk.

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For further information, please contact:

Frances Sutton, Press Manager, Edinburgh International Book Festival

frances@edbookfest.co.uk or 07841 579481

Notes to editors:

Claire Askew is a poet, novelist and community educator based in Edinburgh. Her debut novel, *All The Hidden Truths*, was the winner of the 2016 Lucy Cavendish Fiction Prize, and longlisted for the 2014 Peggy Chapman-Andrews (Bridport) Novel Award. Claire holds a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Edinburgh and has won a variety of accolades for her work, including the Jessie Kesson Fellowship and a Scottish Book Trust New Writers Award. Her debut poetry collection, *This changes things*, was published by Bloodaxe in 2016 and shortlisted for the Edwin Morgan Poetry Award and a Saltire First Book Award. In 2016 Claire was selected as a Scottish Book Trust Reading Champion, and she works as the Scotland tutor for women's writing initiatives Write Like A Grrrl! and #GrrrlCon.

Eleanor Thom is a fiction and creative non-fiction writer and lives in Edinburgh. The focus of much of Eleanor's writing is migration, social history and remembrance and her novel *The Tin-Kin* (Duckworth, 2009), is a fictionalised family story about three generations of Scottish Travellers, moving off the road and chaotically adapting to life in the town. An early chapter won the 2007 New Writing Ventures Award for Fiction, and the book went on to win the Saltire First Book of the Year Award in 2010.

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