

## **Wigtown Festival Company**

### **Chair's Report**

**AGM, 10 February 2022**

### **Wigtown Festival Company April 2020 – March 2021**

During the period of April 2020 – March 2021, the Company adapted quickly to changes resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic, adjusting programming and developing ways of reaching and engaging with existing and new audiences beyond Scotland.

During lockdown, the Company shifted to a digital-only offering in order to reach audiences, launching Wigtown Wednesdays, which featured well attended online events during the pandemic. A weekly Wigtown Podcast with Peggy Hughes was also launched, as was the commissioning of new writing for the Wigtown Book Festival website.

In 2020, the Company hosted its 22<sup>nd</sup> annual book festival entirely online, which included 98 events across 11 days. The programme received over 32,000 views from 10,000 unique addresses in countries including the UK, USA, Canada, Germany, Ireland and Australia. The Festival also included a Bookshop showcase, highlighting Wigtown bookshops not otherwise benefitting from tourism. [This digital Festival was donations-only, but the generosity of audiences exceeded expectations.] The Wigtown Poetry Prize was delivered as a part of the Festival, with prize-winners announced in an online event.

The Company delivered two digital Big DoG Festivals during this period, in April/May of 2020 and March of 2021. In 2020, 12 events broadcast to an audience of 900 viewers and in 2021, 19 events reached 1,100 viewers. A children's creative writing competition was also launched in partnership with DG Unlimited and the Royal Highland Show with almost 100 entries received from across the region. A six-month sensory stories and rhymes project was also delivered [online, supporting those with additional needs.]

The Company's Big Bang festival returned in an online format in 2021, with 10 events spread across four days. During this period, the Company also delivered an adult and young writer mentoring scheme for five mentees, and online activity during the 2020 Book Week Scotland.

Funded by Creative Scotland, the Company reconvened the Scottish Book Festivals Network, a vehicle for knowledge sharing, advocacy, networking and sharing of best practice across Scotland's more than 60 literary festivals. Despite the move to digital delivery during this period, the Spot-lit programme also continued, supporting the development of literary tourism, [with the Company working with local partners to develop new activity] in the region.

While the accounts are currently with the auditor, it is fair to say that, despite the challenges of COVID 19, financially the Company began 2021-22 in a stable position thanks to the closure grants, online support from audiences, fundraising and the government's furlough scheme. Income for the year was £523k, with expenditure of £427k and restricted funds carried forward of £42k.

Since this period, the Company has delivered a hybrid online and digital Festival in 2021, and continues to move towards an in-person offering as restrictions ease. Wigtown Festival Company remains grateful to the many volunteers, funders, sponsors, private donors and members of the local community who continue to give so generously to support the work of the charity, which aspires to make Dumfries & Galloway a place where literature changes lives.

**Marjorie Lotfi**

**26 January 2022**