

The Edinburgh International Book Festival is moving from Charlotte Square

Think of the Book Festival and you will undoubtedly think of Charlotte Square. Well, not this year.

The Edinburgh International Book Festival is moving to the Edinburgh College of Art on Lauriston Place in August. The hope is that depending on Covid-19 restrictions at that point, the festival will be able to use indoor and outdoor spaces for their talks and readings.

The reason is simply economics. It costs far too much for the charity to put up the tents in Charlotte Square, and presumably to pay for the grass repairs afterwards too.



The Lauriston Place campus

This was one of the festivals which really managed to carry on and have some presence in 2020 with its studios in the city centre and live sessions on YouTube which audiences could watch again.

Nick Barley, Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival said, "While we are now experiencing a full lockdown in Scotland which is challenging for so many people on so many levels, we very much hope that the combination of this, together with the ongoing vaccination programme, will bring the virus under control by August. While 2020 proved extremely challenging for the Book Festival it also opened up some extraordinarily exciting opportunities. Building on the success of our online Book Festival we can now announce that we will be entering into a new strategic partnership with the University of Edinburgh that will enable us to inhabit this innovative space in 2021 with facilities to create events for both digital and, if circumstances permit, physical audiences.

"Covid-19 has created a huge tectonic shift in the way that live events, ourselves included, can reach their audiences. With in-person ticket sales impossible to forecast this August, we simply can't justify incurring the costs of the tents and infrastructure we'd normally put into Charlotte Square Gardens. It is highly probable that most events will take place online, and the need for broadcast studios is more likely than large venues for an audience.

"In the grassy courtyard of Edinburgh College of Art we will, if rules allow, recreate the elements of the Book Festival that our audiences love – bookshops, cafes and open spaces in which to come together safely offering the 'oasis of calm' for which the Book Festival is renowned. The College offers excellent studio and theatre facilities for both online broadcasting and potential events with a socially distanced audience."

He added: "We intend that this partnership with the University will be a long-term arrangement, and the Book Festival will continue to occupy their spaces when a Covid-free Festival, with audiences able to enjoy live events in person, can be staged. However digital events will continue to be a key

part of future Book Festivals, enabling us to reach truly global audiences as well as those closer to home who face barriers to attending the event. We are excited that our hybrid festivals of the future will engage with authors and audiences around the world in a more environmentally responsible way.”



Edinburgh College of Art

Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, Professor Peter Mathieson, said, “We were delighted to be asked by the Edinburgh International Book Festival to support future events through this mutually beneficial arrangement. Building on our existing partnership this new deeper relationship will help to ensure that people in Edinburgh, and all over the world, can continue to come together to explore the power of ideas through their love of literature.”



The 2020 Festival made the most of online.

This new partnership will allow the Edinburgh International Book Festival to occupy spaces within the University of Edinburgh’s Edinburgh College of Art in August. The University of Edinburgh will operate catering and bar provisions, if permitted by the Government’s Covid-19 guidelines, while the Book Festival is on.

The 2020 Edinburgh International Book Festival presented a fully digital programme In August, with 146 online events ranging from daily draw-alongs to conversations with Bernardine Evaristo, Douglas Stuart, Samantha Power, Matt Haig, Hilary Mantel and Marian Keyes.

Audiences watched and engaged with events from around the world and have continued to watch on demand over the winter months.

The full programme for the 2021 Edinburgh International Book

Festival will be announced at the end of June. Author conversations from the 2020 Book Festival, and all other information, can be found at www.edbookfest.co.uk.



Andrew O'Hagan at the 2020 Edinburgh International Book Festival