

New director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival named

The new Festival Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival (EIBF) will take over in September when Nick Barley steps down after 14 years.

Jenny Niven who is a cultural producer and director has been named as his successor. Niven has worked on a range of literary festivals in Scotland and elsewhere, including Push the Boat Out in Edinburgh.

She founded and directed the award-winning Push the Boat Out, a festival of poetry, spoken word and language, she was Executive Producer of Dandelion, an epic programme of sowing, growing and sharing across Scotland, and was previously the Head of Literature at Creative Scotland.

She is currently chair of Literature Alliance Scotland, and for five years between 2014-2019, was Head of Literature, Languages and Publishing at Creative Scotland, Scotland's national funding and development agency. In this role, she provided strategic guidance across the sector, and fostered investment in hundreds of organisations and writers. During her time at Creative Scotland, Jenny led in the creation of the sectoral review of Literature and Publishing in Scotland, the Muriel Spark 100 Centenary celebrations in 2018, and Creative Scotland's first Scots Language Policy.

In 2016, she was invited by the board of the Edinburgh International Book Festival to lead the organisation on secondment as Acting Director over the winter months of 16/17, winning the Festival a Herald Angel Award for the groundbreaking 'Outriders' program. Prior to Creative Scotland, Jenny lived and worked abroad for ten years in Melbourne and Beijing. In Melbourne, Jenny was Associate Director at the Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas, and Programme Manager at the Melbourne Writers Festival, developing events and festival programs with a stellar array of Australian and international writers and thinkers. From 2004–2009 she lived in Beijing, where she was inaugural Director of Beijing's first book festival and literary events program, The Bookworm International Literary Festival, China.

She has participated in festivals all over the world – in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Germany, Australia, Korea, Indonesia, Shetland, and as an intern on PEN World Voices festival, NYC. With a long-term parallel interest in TV and radio, she was researcher on the BBC2 TV series, Writing Scotland, hosted China Radio International's English language show 'Voices from Other Lands', and has been a regular reviewer on Melbourne's Triple RRR radio station and BBC Radio Scotland. She was on the founding Board of the Stella Prize for Australian Women's Writing, has judged a range of literary prizes, and has interviewed leading authors such as David Mitchell, Yiyun Li, Jeffrey Eugenides, Kate Grenville, Jennifer Egan, Colson Whitehead, Kathleen Jamie, Andrew O'Hagan, Armando Iannucci and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Mo Yan.

Nick Barley, outgoing Edinburgh International Book Festival Director, said: "I am absolutely over the moon that Jenny Niven has been chosen to take over from me as the next Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival. Jenny has a stellar reputation in the world of literature and culture, both in Scotland and elsewhere. She is open-minded, dynamic and – vitally for this role – a good listener who

knows that running a festival is a team game. On top of that, her creativity, connections and enthusiasm will be a huge asset to the Festival.”

Allan Little, Chair of the Edinburgh International Book Festival Board of Directors, said: “We are very excited to welcome Jenny Niven as the new Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival. Nick leaves incredibly big shoes to fill, but Jenny is no stranger to the Festival or the world of the written word here in Scotland, and indeed further afield, and we look forward to seeing what she brings to this new Book Festival chapter.”

Jenny Niven, the new Edinburgh International Book Festival Director, said: “I am absolutely thrilled to be appointed to lead the Edinburgh International Book Festival as its new Director. The Festival has influenced Scottish culture, and shaped the development of book festivals globally, for 40 years. There’s no greater platform to bring together the conversations that we need to have, to celebrate the role of creativity, imagination and story in understanding and reshaping the world around us, and to demonstrate that exploring the world collectively via books and ideas is one of the most rewarding and enriching experiences you can have.

“The opportunity to reimagine the Festival in its exciting new home at the Edinburgh Futures Institute, and to lead the organisation at such a pivotal time for Scotland’s cultural life, is an honour. Following the inspirational lead of Nick and his predecessors, I am excited to begin working with the impressive Festival team and board, and the incredible network of partners the Festival has cultivated in Scotland and beyond, to build on the Festival’s stellar reputation and to shape its future.”



Jenny Niven, new director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival PHOTO Ian Georgeson



Jenny Niven and Kevin Williamson at the launch of Push the Boat out on the canal © 2021 Louise Montgomery