

Scottish Government must act to secure Deaf Festival's future

Deaf creatives and young people have called on The Scottish Government and Creative Scotland to guarantee a fair deal for Deaf Arts.

The third annual Edinburgh Deaf Festival (9-18 August), which runs in tandem with the Fringe, is currently in full swing but organisers fear for its future without proper support.

In an [open letter](#) Scottish Culture Secretary, Angus Robertson, recently pledged more funding for Scotland's festivals and a strategic partnership with Creative Scotland and Event Scotland. He described the arts festivals as *"a jewel in the cultural sector and national life"*.

Since then, however, there have been warnings of widespread cuts to arts funding.

Philip Gerrard, CEO of Deaf Action which runs the Edinburgh Deaf Festival, said: "We welcome the latest warm words from the Scottish Government, but what we need is prompt action.

"This festival has been a huge success but we only just managed to survive this year due to the funding challenges, and 2025 looks bleak. Festivals take a long time to organise, and that cannot be done without financial security.

"We previously took the Scottish Government at its word when

its British Sign Language National Plan pledged to work with Creative Scotland to support and encourage deaf arts. The results have been failure, disappointment, bundles of red tape.

“This is a unique festival which has been built and developed by the deaf community for deaf and hearing audiences. It is lively, vibrant and fun – providing a showcase for deaf talent, providing access to deaf culture and supporting and encouraging deaf young people.

“All we want is a fair deal so we can ensure that this festival has a sustainable future and can make its contribution to Scotland as a nation of fabulous festivals.”

Creative Scotland has repeatedly rejected three-year funding bids by Edinburgh Deaf Festival, despite recommendations from its own staff.

Deaf Action is also concerned that, unlike the Arts Council of England, Creative Scotland does little to ensure deaf people are represented in its decision and policy making, or even that staff have deaf awareness training.

This year’s festival, slimmed down due to the shortage of funds, has nonetheless presented its first-ever specially commissioned play.

The *Ghost of Alexander Blackwood*, which celebrates the lives of Edinburgh’s early deaf rights pioneers, is the work of an all-deaf team and has been popular with audiences.

This has helped deliver one of the festival’s key goals, to provide opportunities for Scotland’s highly talented deaf creatives.

The programme also features:

- **Gavin Lilley:** The renowned deaf comedian brings us his

stories about life as a sign language user, traveller, and a weary father of three. Gavin performs across the UK and Europe and has performed alongside John Bishop. A unique perspective on our diverse cultures.

- **Listen to the Forest:** Do forests carry a message which needs to be shared? This is the place to ask these questions and listen to the voice of the forest. Take a journey that melds movement improvisation, music, creative writing and BSL. A dance performance created from a workshop on the same day.
- **John Smith:** Drawing on personal experience and real-life observations, John offers an amusing insight into what it's like as a deaf person navigating a hearing world.
- **Life is a (Deaf) Cabaret:** Join us for fresh and exciting cabaret, as emerging performers take to the stage to showcase their talents. Featuring dance, sign songs, comedy, drama, and monologues, performances will be a mix of English and BSL.
- **There Is No Me Without You:** Two sisters navigating life's challenges, growing apart and rediscovering the true meaning of family. A short theatre performance followed by Q&A.

The festival has a programme of tours, workshops, family and children's activities all suitable for BSL users.

These include tours at the National Galleries of Scotland, the Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh Castle and National Museums Scotland.

Workshops allow participants to discover more about everything from photography to deaf history. There are children and young people's workshops on art, interactive storytelling, TV production and more.

Then there are also a variety of other productions which are holding accessible performances including Lubna Kerr's new play *Chatterbox*, which is part of the Fringe and the Edinburgh

International Festival's *Hamlet*.

An "Interpreter on demand" service allows deaf people to arrange an interpreter or captioner for Fringe shows that are not accessible.

- For more about the funding issues see the Deaf Action website [here](#).



Pictured outside Deaf Action's Albany Street (Edinburgh) headquarters are (clockwise from middle left) : Philip Gerard (Deaf Action CEO), Mitchell Graham – Deaf Action Youth Club Manager, Jamie Rea (correct, Deaf Festival Producer).

With members of the Deaf Action Youth Club (who are all deaf, or not deaf but from deaf families) – clockwise from middle right: Amelia Goodacre, Rowan Rodriguez-McFadden, Niamdh Braid and Elizabeth Goodacre (in centre of group)

Photography for Deaf Action from: Colin Hattersley Photography