



Press Release

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University hosts public debate on future role of arts and culture

People from around the world are being invited to take part in a series of online events which will examine how the arts and creative sectors can help society recover from the effects of Covid-19.

The *Edinburgh Culture Conversations* will bring together members of the public, artists, academics and cultural leaders to debate the future shape and purpose of the culture sector.

The 10-week series – hosted by the University of Edinburgh – takes place against the backdrop of the cancellation of most of Edinburgh’s Festivals, which had been due to take place in August.

The online debates begin on Monday 13 July, with the first conversation considering the question “*How can we keep the Festival spirit of internationalism and interculturalism alive?*”

Janet Archer, the University of Edinburgh’s Director of Festivals, Cultural and City Events, will chair the weekly conversations which will debate the value of creativity, not only to the arts, but also to society and the wider economy.

A distinguished panel of guests is set to include Director of the Edinburgh International Festival Fergus Linehan, CEO of the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival Shona McCarthy, singer-songwriter Karine Polwart, British Art Show 9 artist Hanna Tuulikki and Scots Makar Jackie Kay.

Members of the public are being encouraged to submit questions during the debates, which will be streamed live. The resulting recordings and transcript will be made available to stimulate further discussion.

The Conversations are being staged in conjunction with the University of Edinburgh’s new centre for interdisciplinary learning and research. The Edinburgh Futures Institute – which will be housed in the city’s iconic former Royal Infirmary building – will showcase the University’s expertise in the humanities, social sciences and arts, alongside its sector-leading work in data science.

The University, its students and staff play a key role in the Edinburgh festivals each year. In 2019, 1.2 million Fringe goers visited venues on the University campus, which hosted 65 individual theatre spaces, bars and offices.

Janet Archer said: “*The impact of the pandemic is being felt by people around the world. The forced closure of cultural gathering spaces has had a devastating impact on artists, our economies and cultural existence. The Edinburgh Culture Conversations will provide a platform for the important debate on how the arts can be part of civic, emotional and economic recovery for the future.*”

The *Edinburgh Culture Conversations* run weekly from Monday 13 July. For more details or to sign up, visit: <https://edin.ac/2Z4YZwc>

For more information, please contact:

Ranald Leask, Corporate Communications Manager, 07805 609264, ranald.leask@ed.ac.uk



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