



PITLOCHRY
FESTIVAL
THEATRE



Annual Review
2023/24

The Maggie Wall

A stunning new piece of writing from Martin McCormick, this one-woman show was such a huge success when it premiered in the Studio during the summer of 2022 that it was revived at the very end of our 2023 summer season. Directed by Amy Liptrott, who was previously our Associate Director and is now Artistic Director of Aberdeen Arts Centre, the new 2023 show was a co-production with Aberdeen Arts Centre and went on to tour the Highlands after its runs in Pitlochry and Aberdeen.



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Since 1951, Pitlochry Festival Theatre has been the artistic heart and soul of Highland Perthshire. Attracting over 100,000 visitors every year, we're more than simply a place to come and see a show, we're Scotland's leading producer of musical theatre, a champion of ensemble practice and the country's only rurally-located major arts organisation.

Our purpose is to improve lives by sharing Pitlochry with the world and the world with Pitlochry and our mission is to create live-changing experiences for as many people as possible in our communities, through our theatre and our environments.

As a charitable organisation, in everything we do – from community engagement to creative development, from sustainable practice to artistic collaboration, and from showcasing new works to staging timeless classics – we are committed to nurturing an exciting cultural future for Scotland.

Sunshine on Leith (front cover)

Over Christmas 2023, we invited audiences to Pitlochry Festival Theatre to enjoy this feel-good large-scale musical, staged in our Auditorium and directed by Elizabeth Newman. A new production, it was inspired by our hugely successful summer 2022 show, co-produced with Capital Theatres. Tickets sold incredibly well and the show's popular appeal during the festive period brought a wealth of new audiences to Pitlochry.



The Secret Garden

Staged outside in our Amphitheatre, Elizabeth Newman's adaptation of the much-loved children's classic by Frances Hodgson Burnett was produced in 2023 and presented as a large-scale family work. It proved highly popular, with family audiences coming to us from near and far, and it was instrumental in introducing a new generation of young people to the joy of live performance. As well as receiving exceptional reviews, *The Secret Garden* sold out and remained in demand, leading to the decision to revive it for our 2024 summer season.

Executive Director's Review

"Our aim is to secure a sustainable and prosperous future for Pitlochry Festival Theatre while nurturing the vibrant artistic spirit that defines us."

Kris Bryce, Executive Director

Over the past year, from April 2023 to March 2024, our focus has been on solidifying our financial foundation, expanding our reach and cultivating resilience within our community. In addition, as part of our commitment to sustainability, we've introduced a number of innovative practices to reduce our carbon footprint, ensuring that our operational activity firmly aligns with our ambition to become Scotland's first net-zero theatre, ahead of current Scottish Government targets.

Financial priorities

Financial sustainability is crucial if we are to ensure that we continue to thrive and to deliver against our mission to create life-changing experiences for as many people as possible in our many communities, through our theatre and our environments. Over the past year, we have therefore prioritised the solidification of our financial foundation to support long-term stability and growth. This has included diversifying revenue streams, enhancing financial management practices and implementing rigorous cost controls.

- To diversify and strengthen revenue streams, in response to both wider economic pressures and a lack of clarity around funding priorities, we have focused on expanding our donor base, increasing grant funding and developing strategic partnerships. Philanthropic income is a critical element of our future and our decision to appoint our first Director of Development reflects our commitment to building a robust fundraising infrastructure to ensure we are sustainable as a charitable entity.
- To enhance financial management, we have implemented software solutions that streamline our processes, freeing up more time for analysis. Additionally, we have restructured our internal framework to align with the Theatre's

future goals, ensuring we are positioned for growth; this included enhancing internal team members' skills, enabling them to deliver superior support and functionality across the organisation.

- To implement rigorous cost controls, we have introduced new budgeting approaches that provide greater accuracy and accountability. We have restructured our management accounts to offer clearer insights into financial performance and we have implemented new purchase order and expense systems to enhance tracking and control of outgoings. These measures help to ensure that our financial resources are used efficiently and effectively, supporting the overall stability and growth of the organisation.

In addition, our focus on maximising box office revenue through strategic programming and marketing has proven effective, with shows like *Sunshine on Leith* performing extremely well against its financial target. This type of success is critical to reinforcing our financial sustainability.

Key investments and their impact

Our three strategic goals of Engagement, Collaboration and Sustainability are firmly rooted in our mission and, throughout the year, we have invested in our infrastructure by focusing on detailed planning to enhance our facilities and provide a more enriching experience for our audiences. Between April 2023 and March 2024, this included energy efficiency upgrades and the commencement of the next phase (Phase 1b) of our *VISION* Capital Project. Our inclusion in the Tay Cities Region Deal provided crucial funding for this transformational building work, further strengthening our financial outlook.

Another critical area of investment has been in our artistic programming. By

Executive Director's Review (cont.)

securing co-productions and tours, such as *Group Portrait in a Summer Landscape* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Study in Lipstick, Ketchup and Blood*, we have not only enriched our offerings but also opened up new revenue streams and ensured that our own work is being seen by greater numbers of people and in venues beyond our own.

Finally, we have invested in expanding our trading operations, which are now showing renewed growth post pandemic. This has included improvements to our on-site facilities and services, leading to increased revenue from concessions such as the sale of production-specific merchandise and garden plants, as well as other trading activities including our popular fine dining evenings and roast dinners. As a result, we look forward to achieving our projected increase in trading revenue in the next financial year and continuing to build on this important aspect of our business operations.

Progress of the VISION Capital Project

Our VISION Capital Project aims to transform our facilities, ensuring they meet the highest standards of sustainability and accessibility while also enhancing overall visitor experience.

"This year, we made significant strides in sustainability with initiatives such as energy-efficient upgrades and the installation of renewable energy sources. These projects have substantially reduced our carbon footprint and operational costs. We are also working on a comprehensive Carbon Management Plan with sustainability engineers to guide our future sustainability efforts and define our path to net zero."

Following our 2020-22 Phase 1a work to transform our Foyer and build our brand new 172-seat Studio theatre, in

January 2024 we embarked on two major upgrades that reflect our commitment to environmental sustainability, as part of Phase 1b. The first was the replacement of the glass curtain walls that look over the River Tummel to Ben-Y-Vrakie and the second was the refurbishment of our roof and air systems. Both interventions will improve our energy efficiency and move us closer to our ambition to be Scotland's first net-zero theatre by 2035. They also significantly improve the aesthetic and functional aspects of our facilities. Close monitoring, using advanced energy management systems, has delivered reductions in both our carbon footprint and operational costs.

Drawing down funds through the Tay Cities Region Deal has been instrumental in driving the VISION Capital Project forward, and while Phases 1a and 1b focused on accessibility and sustainability respectively, Phase 1c, commencing next year, will focus on user experience. Through planned restoration of our Auditorium and stage infrastructure, we will streamline our pre-production facilities, bringing theatre-making, rehearsing and performing together in one united environment. We will also upgrade our visitor facilities by radically re-imagining our hospitality and retail spaces, supporting our ambition to deliver the highest quality visitor experience and be the destination of choice for cultural experiences for visitors from across the UK.

Investments in our workforce

We are dedicated to developing our workforce and fostering an inclusive, supportive environment. Over the course of 2023/24, we implemented several initiatives to support the people who work for us and with us.

- We launched a new online learning platform, with extensive access to courses that both enhance skills and support personal development. All managers within the organisation completed the IOSH accredited Managing Safely qualification to enhance our team's health and safety competencies, and key personnel

completed Train the Trainer courses to deliver focused statutory Health & Safety training inhouse, with directly relevant content for our teams.

- As a member of Living Wage Scotland, we delivered remuneration uplifts across the organisation in line with Living Wage guidance, providing practical support to our workforce during the ongoing cost of living crisis.
- We continued to support flexible working arrangements and we enhanced our Employee Assistance Service to a best-in-class platform. This now provides 24/7 access to extensive mental health services and meaningful legal and financial support services, as well as unlimited access to GP and private prescription services, regardless of whether the requirement is work related or simply supports wellbeing in an employee's personal life.
- We introduced regular mental health workshops and stress management training sessions to equip our workforce with practical tools for maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Upholding our commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

During 2023/24, we continued to prioritise Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) as central tenets of our operations and our EDI Working Group has been instrumental in helping to develop policies that promote an inclusive and respectful work environment. Training sessions on unconscious bias and cultural competency have been conducted to ensure staff are aware of and committed to these values, and our EDI Working Group staff representatives attended detailed workshops on gender identity and neurodiversity to better support the requirements of our workforce. These initiatives have not only fostered a more inclusive workplace but also enhanced our community engagement efforts by ensuring that our programmes and outreach activities are accessible and welcoming to diverse audiences and their needs.

Looking to the future

By 2029, we aim to be recognised locally, nationally and internationally as a premier destination for exceptional cultural experiences. Our strategic objectives for the coming years include achieving financial stability, deepening community engagement and promoting environmental sustainability.

We are deeply grateful for the unwavering dedication and hard work of our team and the steadfast support of our Board, and our donors, partners and wider communities. With this combined effort, we look forward to a future filled with exciting opportunities and continued growth, confident that Pitlochry Festival Theatre will continue to thrive and inspire for many years to come.



Kris Bryce
Executive Director

A Streetcar Named Desire

Directed by Elizabeth Newman, this classic piece of work on our main Auditorium stage was hugely successful both commercially and critically. Earning Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland nominations for Kirsty Stewart who played Blanche DuBois and for Elizabeth Newman as Director, it will now be revived in autumn 2024 to be presented at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh and then Aberdeen Performing Arts, bringing Pitlochry Festival Theatre's work to new audiences in central Scotland and the northeast.



Artistic Director's Review

"In response to invaluable lessons learned in previous years – balancing artistic integrity, audience engagement and financial challenges facing British theatres – we thoughtfully focused and streamlined our 2023/2024 programme to great effect."

Elizabeth Newman, Artistic Director

Through our entire body of work during 2023/24, we fostered strategic collaborations to enable us to continue to deliver high-quality, diverse theatrical experiences that resonate with our audiences and support the vibrant Scottish theatre community. Through these thoughtful choices, Pitlochry Festival Theatre remains a beacon of creativity, resilience and inspiration.

Production overview

Our purpose is to improve lives by sharing Pitlochry with the world and the world with Pitlochry, and delivering an outstanding artistic programme is the golden thread woven through every part of our organisation. We may be located in a small Highland town, but we gather people from all over the world to share and experience stories together, and we do that Inside, Outside and Online. I'm delighted to say that our campus was alive with activity over the summer of 2023.

INSIDE

Recognising the need to deliver impactful, memorable experiences during 2023/24, we concentrated our Auditorium productions around four carefully selected shows – a blockbuster musical, a classic period drama, a statement drama and a new Scottish play.

Our blockbuster classic *Gypsy*, by Jule Styne with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and a book by Arthur Laurents, captivated audiences with its iconic score and powerful storytelling while our classic period drama, Noël Coward's *Brief Encounter*, adapted by Emma Rice, transported audiences with its timeless romance and emotional depth. We staged *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams as our statement drama, and it was a choice that not only resonated with its intense exploration of human frailty and desire but was nominated for both the Best

Director and Outstanding Performance awards at the Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland (CATS).

Finally, our thought-provoking new Scottish play, *Group Portrait in a Summer Landscape*, written by Peter Arnott, was a co-production with the Royal Lyceum Theatre and directed by their Artistic Director, David Greig. This play not only underlined our commitment to nurturing contemporary Scottish voices but allowed us to share financial risk with a fellow theatre organisation, extend the life of the show and reach new audiences with our work.

The importance of nurturing new audiences and voices was at the forefront of our work in the new Studio theatre too, and we leveraged exciting partnerships to bring diverse and dynamic work to this intimate setting. In collaboration with A Play, a Pie and a Pint (Glasgow Lunchtime Theatre), we co-commissioned and presented two new short plays. *The Great Replacement* by Maryam Hamidi and Uma Nada-Rajah shone the spotlight on BAME female Scottish writers and firmly aligned our work to our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) objectives; *Forever Home* by Pauline Lockhart and Alan Penman, directed by Niloo Far Khan, supported our goal to create new work with important and meaningful themes.

Furthering our commitment to nurturing emerging talent, we commissioned and produced *To the Bone* by Isla Cowan, one of Scotland's rising stars, and we also revived *The Maggie Wall* by Martin McCormick, a co-production with Aberdeen Arts Centre, directed by Amy Liptrott, which went on to tour in the Highlands, both building on its success and expanding our own audience reach.

Alongside our co-productions and tours, our 2022 production of *Little Women* was revived in a new production at HOME in

Artistic Director's Review (cont.)

Manchester in December 2023. This enabled us to forge a brand-new relationship with a leading UK venue, as well as support us to draw revenue from and give future life to an existing production.

OUTSIDE

Outside in the Amphitheatre, working within the confines of limited resources during 2023/24, we still delivered two compelling productions and I was thrilled that my adaptation of *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett was a sell-out success – this classic children's story continues to enchant families with its timeless magic and was a delight to produce. *Sherlock Holmes: A Study in Lipstick, Ketchup and Blood* by Lesley Hart was revived through a co-production with the English company OVO, the Roman Theatre of St Albans, and its intriguing mystery thrilled audiences here in Pitlochry before playing to huge success at OVO.

Our Summer Riverbank was transformed into a vibrant hub for people of all ages, enhancing our summer food and beverage offerings and fostering community engagement. Although we did not stage a large-scale family musical on the lawn this year, the space was still buzzing with activity and creativity.

ONLINE

We continued to produce work on our digital platform Sound Stage, reaching audiences across the world who may not be able to visit us in person for any number of reasons. Our 2023/24 programme included the Fireworks series, where we celebrated the life of Nan Shepherd in a co-production with Firebrand Theatre Company. This played to maximum capacity online and received exceptional feedback.

Supporting our commitment to upholding the tenets of EDI in our work, we recorded *Blaccine* with Stockroom Theatre Company – three new monologues about the black lived experience of Covid vaccinations – and, in a co-production with Prime Theatre,

our Queer Emerging Artists project, *Queer, There and Everywhere*, closed our autumn/winter Sound Stage season. Featuring voices from around the world telling stories of queerness that transcend culture and borders, we particularly focused on stories from individuals living in countries where LGBTQIA+ rights are threatened.

Festive highlights

Having considered many possibilities for our 2023 festive show, we took the decision to create a brand-new production of our beloved *Sunshine on Leith*, previously co-produced in 2022 with Capital Theatres. This decision presented several clear strategic advantages:

- lower pre-production costs as mounting a previously successful production required less investment;
- audience demand as previous sell-out performances indicated strong audience interest; and
- scalable production as a smaller ensemble cast would reduce costs without sacrificing quality.

More than 14,000 tickets were purchased for the production, which ran from 17 November to 23 December, yielding the Theatre's most successful Box Office takings for a winter production ever. I'm delighted that nearly 60% of those who booked tickets were new to Pitlochry Festival Theatre, and 35% were under the age of 35, supporting our ambition to expand our reach.

"We transformed our new Studio into a theatrical Santa's Grotto where Santa Claus freely welcomed visitors from all over Scotland to celebrate the festive season. This event was part of our festive weekend alongside our community nativity and Christmas Carol Concerts."

Delivering against our participation and engagement aims

As a vibrant cultural hub, we aim to offer exciting opportunities for participation, artist development and community involvement alongside the professional productions we bring to our own stages.

Our engagement activities in 2023/24 included year-round participation opportunities for all ages through Youth Dance and Drama Club, our Early Years Programme, and Make and Play, as well as bespoke workshops, work placements, Early Stages sessions, the Theatre Show Choir, and the Matinee Audience Club (MAC). For artists, we offered the Writer's Room, online artist 1-2-1s, artist drop-ins and artist open days.

Targeted engagement projects last year included NT Connections, artist development partnerships, and a three-year collaboration with Perth International Café and City of Sanctuary which offered creative and skills development opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers. We also concluded our three-year *Shades of Tay* project, generating over 250 new pieces of art about the River Tay with Scottish and Scotland-based artists.

Looking forward to the brightest of futures

As the Theatre's Artistic Director, I'm thrilled that Pitlochry Festival Theatre has become Scotland's largest producing theatre in recent years. This milestone secures our status not only as the ultimate destination for audiences but also as a powerful beacon of inspiration for artists. As we embark on our next exciting chapter, we are filled with optimism about the endless creative and artistic possibilities that lie ahead.

Our commitment to producing exceptional work remains unwavering, and we eagerly anticipate the innovative and inspiring performances that will continue to captivate and engage audiences in Pitlochry and beyond. We will continue to make work in collaboration with some of

the world's leading makers and companies and we are excited to journey forward together. The future of Pitlochry Festival Theatre shines brightly.



Elizabeth

Elizabeth Newman
Artistic Director

Spotlight on Performance



Chair's Summary

"Last year, I reflected on the resilience of our theatre community as together we continued to navigate the aftermath of the Covid pandemic. This year, we faced continued challenges, particularly with escalating inflation, but our response has been robust and focused."

Crawford Gillies, Chair of the Board of Trustees

Excellence remains at the heart of our strategy. We have listened to audience members and worked hard to ensure our productions resonate with them. By making our investments in productions work even harder, we have continued to deliver high-quality performances that attract and engage audiences Inside, Outside and Online.

Financially, this year has seen significant progress. With economic pressures remaining high, we have maintained our focus on achieving financial sustainability and, through strategic programming and rigorous cost controls, I am pleased that we have bolstered our financial health. We have continued to invest in our infrastructure, with efforts perhaps less immediately visible than in recent years but still crucial to meeting our long-term commitment to environmental sustainability. Whilst our efforts to diversify revenue streams and enhance our financial management are having an impact, we have more to do, and I look forward to further progress in the coming years.

The journey to self-sufficiency

Public sector support has been indispensable during this period. We are immensely grateful for the continued backing from grant providers like Creative Scotland and Perth & Kinross Council, as well as individual donors, trusts and foundations, local business partners and all our supporters. Their engagement with us is essential to sustaining our operations and enabling us to move towards our objective of self-sufficiency.

Outstanding teamwork and robust governance

Special recognition and thanks go to two groups critical to the Theatre's success. Firstly, our exceptional staff, whose resilience and creativity are continually

inspiring. Under the outstanding leadership of Kris Bryce, our Executive Director, and Elizabeth Newman, our Artistic Director, the team has navigated numerous challenges with enormous dedication. Elizabeth, who will be leaving us in November 2024 to take on a new leadership role as Artistic Director of Sheffield Theatres, has brought innovative productions and critical acclaim to Pitlochry Festival Theatre over the past six years. Her tenure has been marked by diverse and engaging programmes that have drawn audiences from across the UK and beyond. I am grateful for her contribution and look forward to her final production, *The Sound of Music*, this Christmas. I am also delighted to announce that, shortly before publishing this Annual Review, we appointed Alan Cumming as our new Artistic Director.

Secondly, I extend my gratitude to our Board of Trustees. Their expertise, time and unwavering commitment have been invaluable and their strategic guidance has been instrumental in navigating the challenges we face and steering the Theatre towards a sustainable and exciting future.

As we look to the future, I am full of optimism. With the continued support of all our stakeholders and the exceptional talent within our team, I am confident that Pitlochry Festival Theatre will thrive and inspire for many years to come.



Crawford Gillies
Chair of the Board of Trustees



Gypsy

Our production of *Gypsy*, arguably one of Sondheim's greatest musicals, provided a dazzling opening to the 2023 summer season. A brand-new production for Pitlochry Festival Theatre, staged in the Auditorium and directed by Ben Occhipinti, the story of Gypsy Rose Lee and her daughters Baby June and Louise captivated audiences and showcased the talents of Shona White, one of Scotland's finest musical theatre stars. "It's brilliantly handled... and led by a hauntingly powerful Shona White as Rose," commented Joyce MacMillan in *The Scotsman*.

Financial Summary

“Our immediate financial priority is to secure a sustainable future through excellence in our core business, diversifying our revenue streams, relentlessly managing our costs and investing wisely in our campus. We are starting to see the turnaround from the pandemic period but we have lots more to do.”

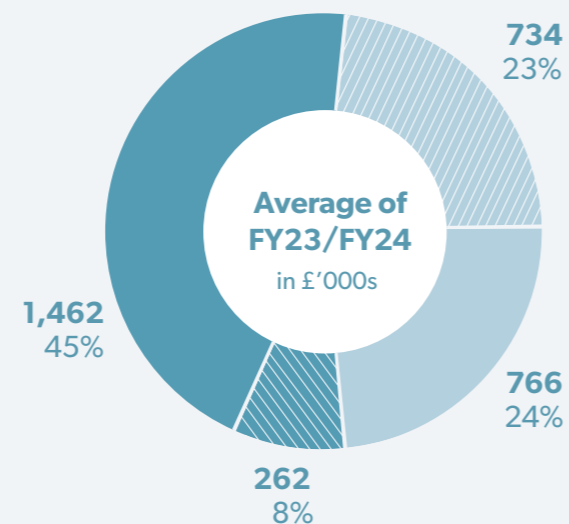
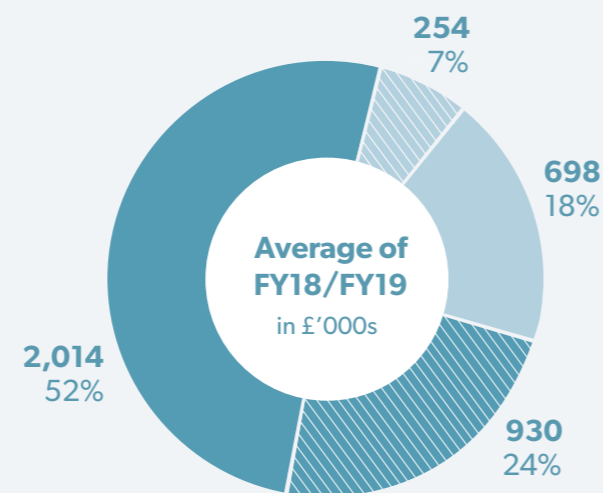
Dougie Cameron, Director of Finance & Operations

Financial performance

Since the pandemic, the finances of the charity have fundamentally changed and we have become more reliant on donations, both to support our operations and also our investment ambitions. Comparing our most recent financial results against the average of the two years prior to the pandemic, earned revenues have fallen while grants have remained static. This is not a sustainable position.

As we prepare for the future we need to invest wisely to grow our earned revenues, manage our cost base and reduce our reliance on grants. In the meantime we will rely more heavily on philanthropy to provide us with the cover to pivot towards a more financially sustainable future.

We have pulled out some key financial trends on the opposite page that have informed our financial strategy. For further insight, our full financial statements and financial review are presented [here](#).



- Tickets
- Food, drink and retail
- Grants
- Unrestricted donations

Key Financial Trends

Earned income

Income from tickets, food, drink and retail has been slow to recover from the pandemic, increasing reliance on donations and grants.

Our average earned income in the last two years is 41% lower than the last two complete years before the pandemic.

Ticket sales are 73% of pre-pandemic levels with audiences now spending half of what they did (per head) on their theatre experience in our building.

Grant income

Grant income has been in standstill since FY18 while costs have escalated. In real terms, our grant income is now worth £164k less than it was 7 years ago.

The grants received by Pitlochry Festival Theatre are particularly modest, however, we generate £9 for every £1 of Creative Scotland investment, which is three times the average conversion rate for Scotland’s major producing theatres. We present exceptional value to public funders.

Costs

The financial pressure on our income means that we are having to manage costs ever more carefully.

In real terms, our FY18 cost base would be £4.5m in FY24 but we have held costs to £4m over the period by spending wisely and collaborating on shows with other co-producers.

We optimise costs wherever possible through procurement, cost sharing and considering new funding models, allowing us to invest in leadership in ethical practices, including paying the Real Living Wage to all workers and switching from gas to sustainable but more expensive electric.

In addition to our capital investment programme for our building, we continue to invest in our organisation to ensure it is robust and financially sustainable.

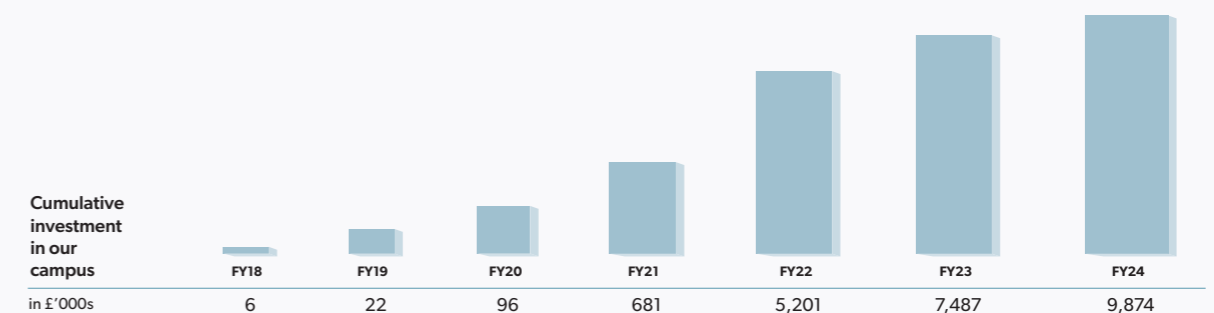
Outlook

In FY25 we are seeing recovery in ticket sales with a strong summer season, and very good pre-sales for winter 2024 and summer 2025. Food, drink and retail sales are recovering as we deploy creative strategies to address local recruitment challenges.

Investment in a sustainable future

We are investing heavily across our campus and have just completed work on environmental sustainability, making the building wind and water-tight. Previous phases enhanced our revenue earning potential by building our Studio, our Amphitheatre and improving our entrance and front of house space.

Future phases of development will improve our Auditorium and further enhance our front of house areas, helping to deliver financial sustainability. Our future plans will take us to total investment in our campus of £20m and we have the ambition to go beyond that.





Group Portrait in a Summer Landscape

This bold, funny and deeply thoughtful play, about family and the forces that have shaped the country we live in today, was written by Peter Arnott and directed by David Greig as a co-production with the Royal Lyceum Theatre. The perfect vehicle for showcasing new Scottish writing, it was staged in our Auditorium during the summer of 2023 and was warmly received here before transferring to Edinburgh.

The Directors of the Theatre are its Trustees for the purposes of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. Those who served from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 were:

Crawford Gillies (Chair), Heather Stuart (Vice-Chair), Graeme Bissett, Malcolm Brown, William Douglas, Robert Garnish, Georgina Gordon, Catriona Heppel, Jane Martin and Jane Wilson.

Thanks also go to our Honorary President, Colin Liddell MBE WS

Pitlochry Festival Theatre is a Company Limited by Guarantee and registered in Scotland, Number SC029243.

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Thanks to



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