

Note of STA Board Meeting Wednesday 30th April 2025 EICC, Edinburgh

In attendance

Rebecca Brooks (RB), John Henderson (JH), Alex McKie (AM), Calum Ross (CR), Alison McRae (AM), Michael Golding (MG), Marshall Dallas (MD), Clare Winskill (CW), Scott Inglis (SL), James Withers (JW), David Lonsdale (DL), Ian Stokes (IS), Martyn Wilson (MW), Emma Simpson (ES)

Online

Elaine Wilson (EW), Alex Borland (AB)

Apologies

Fiona McConnacher (FM), Geoff Ellis (GE), Rob Wicks (RW), Stephen McGowan (SM), Jane McFadzean (JM)

In attendance – STA

Marc Crothall (MC)

Ruth Souter (RS) – Minute taker

Welcome / Apologies - RB

Apologies were noted

Minutes from 4th February 2025 - RB

Minute was approved.

Matters arising – Amendment to be made to note.

MG Proposer

CR Seconding

Meeting Part 1

1. Welcome and apologies

- RB welcomed those present and online.
- An official welcome was made to new Board Members present with an introduction from all around the table.
- Bios on new Board members can be found [here](#).
- Onboarding of new Board members will take place between April 2025 and September 2025, when official goodbyes will be made, new members will be formally appointed at the AGM on 2nd October.
- RB extended a formal thanks to Alison McRae for leading the recruitment panel, as well as Scott Inglis, James Withers and Marc Crothall for their involvement.
- MC presented 4 Induction onboarding Buddy Groups, comprising of 3 existing Board members and 2 new members. See attached sheet with Group breakdown and contact details of all the board. Groups have been put together where it is felt there is a lot of mutual interest and overlap in everyone's day job.

The purpose of the buddy on boarding groups is to allow for informal conversation to take place between existing and new board members in each group – (but not limited) over the onboarding transition period to help ensure that new board members can feel comfortable with and best informed into the STA ways of working and the relevant agendas. Marc will also schedule in a focused 2-3 hr session with each new board member ahead of the September board too. Ruth will co-ordinate diaries

2. Minute of last full board meeting – February 2025

- Amendment to notes to be made by RS
- MG Proposer
- CR Seconding
- No other matters arising

3. Update / Discussion on STA meetings and KEY events - Scottish Tourism Month Activity

- Special thanks to RB and AR for participating as panellists on the STA Spotlight stage at SCOTHOT. The show had 8.5k attend this year.
- STA Signature Conference programme was deemed to be an overall success, with most delegates offering up positive feedback about the programme structure and speakers.
Many commented on the breakfast session with Rebecca Brooks, First Minister John Swinney and Ivan McKee, moderated by Brian Taylor.
- The EICC has been secured to March 2026 plenary session on 10th and the Sheraton is on hold for a potential business workshop/ seminar on afternoon 9th and the Royal Botanical Gardens for a dinner. Brian Taylor has been booked to moderate a Hustings given Scottish Elections will take place on 7th May. The Hustings will form part of the morning programme on 10th before lunch. The leaders of all political parties have been written to with invite to participate.
- MC travelled extensively around Scotland's mainland and Islands during Scottish Tourism Month, speaking at several Destination conferences (North Highlands, Argyll, East Lothian, Arran) as a well as Sectoral conferences and dinners including Sail Scotland and the SPAA annual dinner. In addition to this, the STA had a high profile at many other events throughout the month. It is estimated that c13.5k/14k industry colleagues attended industry events throughout STM2025.

4. DMO and Council Meetings

- Held week beginning 26th April 2025, with both holding common agendas on matters arising within the industry. Circa 25 reps from DMO's across Scotland attended.
- Natalie Clayton and Simon Numphud from AA Media (STA Patrons) presented their FOC Visitor Ready programme and other quality and award schemes they deliver at both meets.
- The main concerns highlighted are funding stability and concern re future bookings.
- Representative for Visit Arran, Sheila Gilmore, highlighted the impact the ferries were having on the Island with 70% of those she met at VisitScotland Connect 2025, stating they would not consider programming Arran due to ongoing ferry problems.
- The core discussion at both meets was about TVL and details of the STA submission paper to the FM and other ministers MSPs was shared, plus an update on the new Board member appointments.

5. ITIC

- MC shared feedback from the ITIC meet at Sheraton on morning the 1st of May 2025. He advised that many of the Irish concerns and challenges mirrored Scotland.
- 2026 bookings pipeline is worrying with Ireland seeing a big decline in numbers.
- Sensitivity around the US market.
- RB stated Ireland has a support network which Scotland doesn't have; Failte Ireland and Tourism Ireland.
- Their main concern is Quarter 3 2026 in terms of weakening demand from travels agents, both domestic and international markets – requesting fewer rooms than before. CR stated similar concern was being relayed to him at recent meetings he attended in Inverness.
- In comparison, Scotland now has a specific government fund (compensation fund) allocated to Islands impacted by ferry disruption.
- Island destinations have a workforce to retain, and the struggle is balancing books around people as well as investing in the product to keep it appealing.
- The rail networks are keen to drive tourism, and MC focuses on this with his work within the Industry Leadership Group.
- 21 Transatlantic routes from Edinburgh Airport, so must focus on positives too.
- Luxury end of the market holding strong
- Huge opportunity within the Business Tourism market and need to focus on how we fight for our market share.
- Whitbread are to move into the budget market within Edinburgh. We must bear in mind that if Edinburgh becomes unattractive, then this will have a ripple effect across the country.
- Position as STA – What are our recommendations for travel agents.
- RB has a meet with Patricia Yates CEO from Visit Britain to discuss further.

6. Visitor Levy (VL)

- MC provided brief update on engagement with and coms with politicians and others following on from the breakfast conversation at Signature Conference.
 - A paper was sent direct to First Minister et al with 3 clear asks.
1. SG to call LAs to pause – slow progress of VL down to allow for impact assessments to be done and more time to consider alternative approach to charging and collection (points 2&3).
 2. Legislate to move from a % calculation of TVL to a Banding approach/flat fee.
 3. Collection Method – QR code or digital format to ensure funds go direct to LA's.
- MC advised he had been told by minister Ivan McKee that using Section 78 may be difficult to change legislation, but stated independent legal advice given to STA /ASSC says it can be done.
 - Edinburgh Council in process of establishing their Visitor Levy Forum announcement of their recruited Chair due beginning 5th of May.
 - There is a need to encourage Government to use methodology.
 - Many Authorities in support of flat fee, VisitScotland supportive of percentage model
 - Some LA's have preconceived notion of how VL will be spent. CEC have already been working on marketing activity from assumed levies.
 - AM proposed a pilot model to test VL – with Edinburgh as a potential example.
 - Definite need for clearer communication with the customer regarding the VL and how it will impact the domestic customer.

- Scottish market makes up c60% of total overnight domestic stays, strong likelihood that this will fall when levy introduced impacted. Islands also run off the domestic market, as well as the Highlands during the winter months, unless exemptions will be a real struggle for many businesses to survive.
- The more this unravels, the more of the STA's membership are opposed to the levy.
- STA'S VIEW: Govt, MSP's, to agree.

1. Pause
2. Pilot (Edinburgh)
3. Re-design (Methodology and Collection)

7. AOB

- MC stated given the financial challenges business are facing there is now an even greater need for focus on our member retention in year ahead with many competing for the £. The team are considering various ways to keep members more engaged through coms and other online and in person events so to present even greater value for membership. MC requested that Board members to assist with securing/ referring new members and Patrons and Supporters. Names and intros to MC /RS
- MC referenced the STA Communications paper prepared by Shonagh Davidson, and due to time pressures asked that board members read over the paper and feedback any comment, thoughts and suggestions direct to Shonagh by end of May

Date of next Board meetings

Board Social Gathering	27 th August 2025 18:00 – 21:30	The House of Gods, Glasgow
Board Meet & Appreciation Dinner for outgoing board members	10 th September 2025 15:00 – 22:30	Inverness- Jacobite Cruises
STA AGM / Networking Business Lunch	2 nd October 2025 10:00 – 15:30	Glasgow – The Social Hub
Board Meet & Evening social event with Patrons & Supporters	2 nd December 2025 – 15.00-21.30	Edinburgh venue TBC

STA 2024/2025- Meeting and Events Optional

Ongoing 3-weekly Sector Check-In Calls	3 weekly – next meet 7 th May 2025	Online
DMO Meeting	1 st September 2025 – 14:00 – 16:00	Online
Council Meeting	2 nd September 2025 – 14:00 – 16:00	Online