



SCOTTISH COMEDY / 2026

# THE SCOTTISH COMEDY SECTOR OVERVIEW

---

What 77 people working in the Scottish comedy scene told us about how it feels, what is working, and what it needs.

---

**77**

people responded

**91%**

were comedians or performers

**26%**

also work behind the scenes:  
promote, book, produce, crew

**91%**

identify with at least one  
underrepresented group

## CONTENTS

# What is in this report

|    |                              |    |
|----|------------------------------|----|
| 01 | How we gathered this         | 3  |
| 02 | Who answered                 | 4  |
| 03 | What's working               | 6  |
| 04 | What the scene needs         | 7  |
| 05 | Quieter signals worth noting | 10 |
| 06 | What people said would help  | 11 |
| 07 | Where this leaves us         | 11 |

### METHOD, IN SHORT

An open survey of the Scottish comedy scene, run from early June to mid-July 2026. Multiple-choice questions alongside open text boxes. Seventy-seven people responded; most wrote at length. Figures are drawn directly from the responses. Quotes are verbatim and unattributed.

**Limitations.** The survey was self-selecting, so it leans towards people engaged enough to answer and with something they wanted to say. It is a snapshot of a mood at one moment, not a census of the industry.

# 01 How we gathered this

---

Between early June and mid-July 2026 we ran an open survey of the Scottish comedy scene. We asked comedians and the people who work around them a simple question: what do you need? Seventy-seven people answered, most of them at length.

The survey mixed multiple-choice questions with open text boxes, and people used those boxes. Many wrote several paragraphs. This report pulls together what they said, both the numbers and the words. Every quote here is real and taken verbatim. None is attributed, so people could be honest.

Two things to hold in mind when reading the figures. First, this was a self-selecting survey, so it leans towards people engaged enough to fill it in and with something they wanted to say. Second, it is a snapshot of a mood at one moment, not a census of the whole industry. What it lacks in statistical neatness it makes up for in candour. A lot of people told us things they do not usually say out loud.

---

## THE HEADLINE STATS

---

**77** people responded

---

**91%** were comedians or performers

---

**26%** also work behind the scenes: promote, book, produce, crew

---

**91%** identify with at least one underrepresented group

---

Percentages throughout are of all 77 respondents unless stated. Where a question let people pick more than one answer, figures add up to more than 100%.

## 02 Who answered

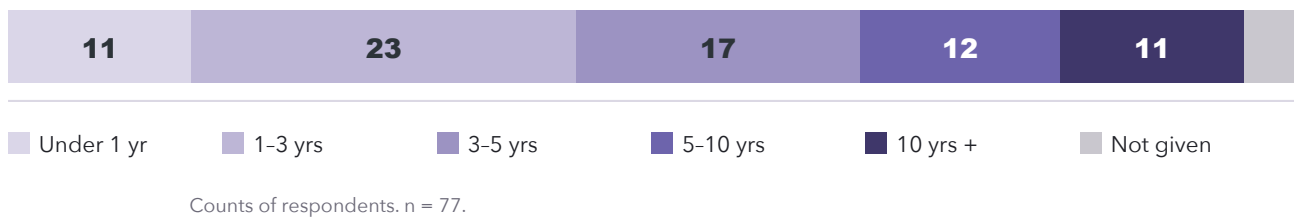
The people who filled this in are overwhelmingly the working circuit: performers, at every stage, most of them juggling comedy around the rest of their lives. A quarter (26%) also work behind the scenes, promoting, booking, producing or in crew and industry roles, on top of gigging.

| ROLE (RESPONDENTS COULD PICK MORE THAN ONE)                       | COUNT | SHARE |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Comedian / performer                                              | 70    | 91%   |
| Promoter / night runner                                           | 13    | 17%   |
| Booker                                                            | 3     | 4%    |
| Producer                                                          | 2     | 3%    |
| Other (editor, scout, technician, videographer, magician, punter) | 7     | 9%    |

### How long they have been at it

Experience spread right across the board, which matters: this is not just the view of beginners or of veterans. Just under half (44%) are three years in or less, two thirds (66%) are five years or less. This is a scene with a very wide base of newer acts.

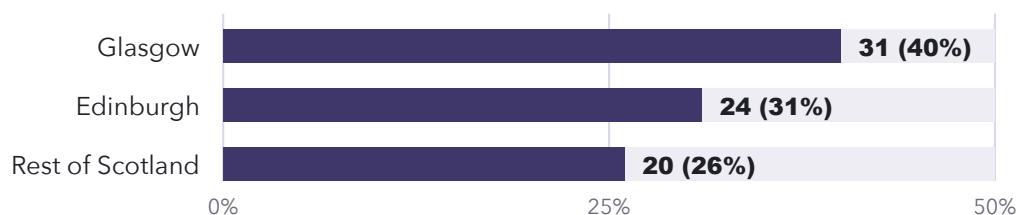
**FIGURE 1** How long respondents have been performing



### Where they are

Just over seven in ten (71%) are based in the two big cities, split fairly evenly, with a handful more splitting their time between them. And a solid quarter answered from the rest of Scotland: Fife, Falkirk, Renfrewshire, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness, Montrose, Cumbernauld and the central-belt towns. As later answers make clear, that geography is felt keenly.

**FIGURE 2** Where respondents are based



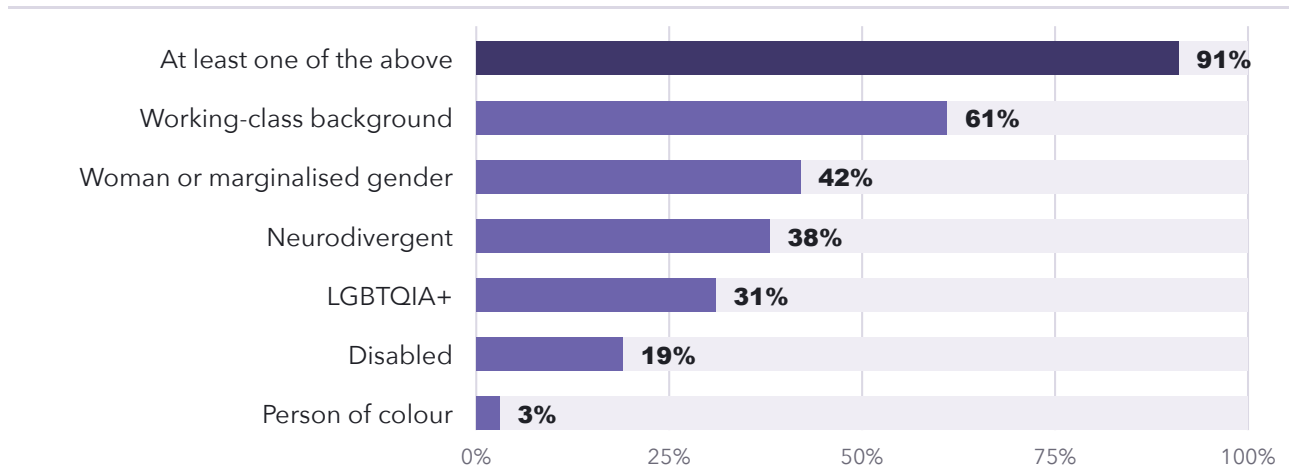
Share of all 77 respondents. Two further respondents were based across both cities, or outside Scotland.

Two further respondents were based across both cities, or outside Scotland. Figures are counts of respondents.

## Who they are

This is the finding that reframes everything else. This is not a homogenous scene answering. It is overwhelmingly made up of people from underrepresented backgrounds, and working-class identity is the single loudest thread running through the whole survey.

**FIGURE 3** Respondents identifying with underrepresented groups



Respondents could identify with more than one group, so figures total more than 100%.

Ninety-one percent identified with at least one underrepresented group. Working-class background (61%) was the biggest by some distance, followed by women and marginalised genders (42%), neurodivergent people (38%) and LGBTQIA+ people (31%). Nearly one in five (19%) are disabled.

## 03 What's working

It would be easy to read the rest of this report as a list of complaints. It should not be. Almost everyone started from a place of real affection for the scene, and several were at pains to say so even while being critical.

### The talent, and the volume of it

The most common single thing people said was going well was the standard of the comedy itself. "The level of talent and hard work is insanely good." "So many extremely talented people performing out there." Alongside that, a genuine sense of abundance at entry level: open mics are plentiful, especially in the central belt, and people starting out can find stage time.

#### SURVEY RESPONDENT

"For beginners there are plenty of open mic nights, some openly supporting diversity and even the ones who don't feel like very safe spaces. Fellow comedians are very supportive, it's not competitive, everyone feels welcome."

### A community that mostly looks after its own

Warmth and support among acts came up again and again. People described kindness, camaraderie, experienced comics helping newer ones, and a scene that is, in the words of one, "more open about its responsibilities to acts" than elsewhere in the UK. Someone performing in England wrote that Scotland "is generally ahead of England in terms of support of acts."

### It is more diverse than it was

Comedians who have been around a decade or more were clear that the scene has changed for the better. "Compared to a decade ago, gender representation has exploded." "More diverse than it used to be, less sexist, more good gigs." That progress is real, and people wanted it recognised even as they asked for more.

### Grassroots initiatives are landing

People named specific things that have helped: newer festivals growing year on year, first-timer support at the Fringe that removes some of the cost barrier, at least one club letting acts keep the door money, and independent funds that got acts to the Fringe or onto bills who otherwise would not have made it. The recurring message was that the corrective initiatives of the last couple of years are working and that people want more of them.

#### SURVEY RESPONDENT

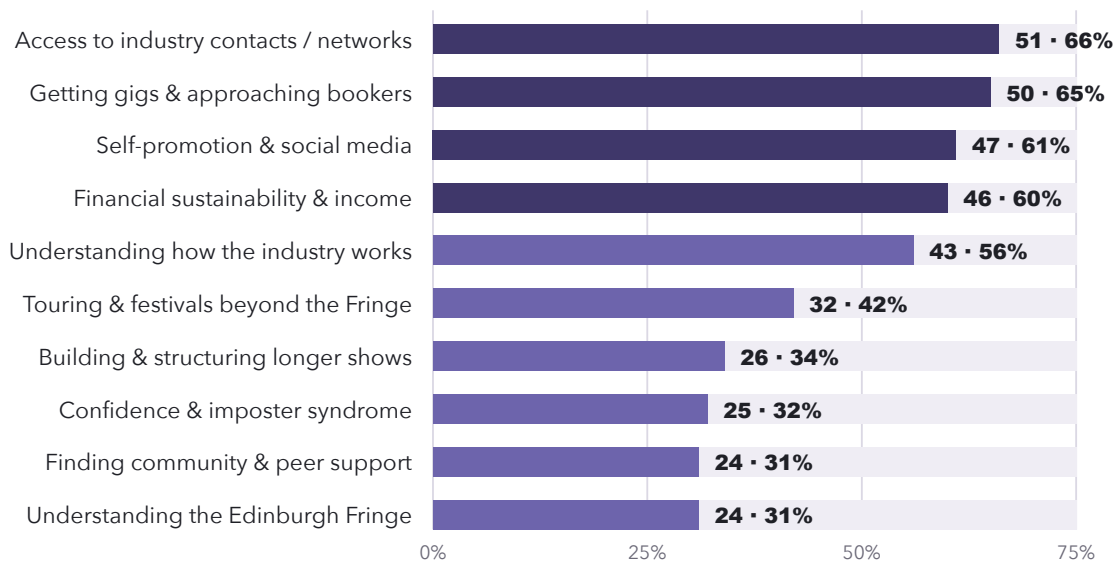
"There's been a rise in supporting Scottish based talent, and it does feel supportive to be here."

## 04 What the scene needs

We asked people, in several different ways, what they struggle with and what would make the biggest difference. The same picture came back from the multiple-choice answers and the free text: this is a scene that is good at getting people started and poor at helping them progress, and money sits underneath almost everything.

When asked to pick their biggest struggles, people's top four answers were all about the same underlying problem: how do you get in front of the right people, get booked, get paid, and understand a system nobody explains?

**FIGURE 4** "When it comes to building a comedy career in Scotland, what do people struggle with most?" (respondents could pick multiple options)



Respondents could pick multiple options, so figures total more than 100%.

### 1. The missing middle

This was the single loudest theme in the whole survey. There is a healthy open-mic base and a small professional tier, and almost nothing connecting them. At least 17 people (22%) described, in their own words, a wall between open mics and paid work with no visible way over it. It is what sits behind the two biggest struggles in the chart above.

#### SURVEY RESPONDENT

"There seems no way to progress beyond open mic nights."

People do not know who bookers are or how to reach them. New-act spots, they said, often go to established acts trying new material rather than to genuinely new acts. And the acts doing the booking are, understandably, reluctant to take a risk on someone unproven, which closes the loop.

#### **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

"Opportunities for comics to get from five-minute open mics to middle tens are few and far between. If you can't get middle tens then you've no chance of getting the necessary experience to go anywhere else."

## **2. Money, and unpaid work**

Sixty percent named financial sustainability as a core struggle, and at least 18 people wrote about it unprompted. This is not abstract. It is travel costs to unpaid gigs, it is full-time jobs that leave people too tired to write, it is the basic sum of whether any of this can ever pay. The working-class make-up of the survey (61%) makes this the thread that ties the whole thing together.

#### **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

"Everyone is an artist until the rent is due."

A specific and repeated grievance: unpaid "open spots" on ticketed shows. Several people, including experienced acts and bookers, drew a hard line between an open mic and a show that charges an audience but pays some of its acts nothing. "We live in an 'exposure' culture." One described travelling across the country to do an unpaid gig to fewer than twenty people on their one night off from work.

Money and the missing middle describe a hidden, class-gated career ladder. People with financial cushion can absorb years of unpaid travel and Fringe costs; people without cannot. As one put it, comedy risks becoming a scene that only "holds a mirror up to a lucky few."

## **3. The ceiling, and the road south**

At least 13 people described the same trap: you can rise in Scotland only so far, and then the route runs out. Above club level there is little touring infrastructure, little route into TV or radio, and a widely shared belief that "real" success means moving to London. Because the people who do break through then leave, those coming up never see anyone above them making it here. Touring specifically was named as a struggle by 42%, and several noted that nobody explains how touring actually works.

#### **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

"At some point, you must move to London. That's supposedly where real success happens. But from where I'm standing on the ladder, that pathway is completely invisible because the infrastructure for that level of success fundamentally does not exist in Scotland. At a certain point, the ladder just disappears."

## **4. Gatekeeping and cliques**

At least 20 people (26%) described the scene as cliquy, insular or run on "who you know." The complaint was consistent: a small number of decision-makers, the same faces booked repeatedly, and progression that can feel like luck or personal favour rather than merit. A number felt this shades into bias, with a narrow idea of the "right" kind of act getting the paid work.

#### **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

"It can feel at times they only promote the bigger acts who do not need the help, or people they personally like. The scene is so much richer than that."

A related structural concern was raised about a small number of large, established clubs: a sense that progression routes into them have narrowed, and that some prefer acts from elsewhere at the busiest times of year. We have not verified these individual claims and do not name venues here, but the pattern was raised often enough to note.

### **5. Everything is Glasgow and Edinburgh**

At least 10 people made the point directly, and the geography of the responses backs them up: the scene is heavily concentrated in the two big cities, and people elsewhere feel it. Acts in Fife, Lanarkshire, Ayrshire, the Highlands and the north-east described having to travel to cities for any opportunity, and one could not take part in comedy at all until they moved.

#### **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

"There is more to Scotland than Edinburgh and Glasgow."

### **6. Access is still an afterthought**

At least 11 people raised physical access and disability, consistent with the 19% of respondents who are disabled. The core problem is blunt: many venues are not step-free, and some have no accessible route to the stage, so disabled acts simply cannot perform in them. Worse, several described access questions on booking forms that lead to nothing.

#### **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

"Why ask about special requirements on booking forms and then do nothing? Totally performative."

### **7. Safety and conduct**

This is a smaller number of people but a serious and recurring one, and it would be wrong to bury it. At least 15 people (19%) raised safety, sexism or misconduct. Themes included persistently male-dominated line-ups (or a single "token" woman), harassment, unsafe green-room culture, and a strong sense that people accused of serious misconduct continue to be booked while those who raise concerns risk being frozen out. Women described keeping informal networks of who to avoid working with.

#### **SURVEY RESPONDENT**

"Female comics have group chats about who to avoid working with, whereas male comics don't know any creepy male comics. That's a men problem."

Several people asked for something concrete here: clear codes of conduct, "written rules" in place of unwritten ones, and a way to raise concerns that does not end a career.

## 8. Craft, and honest feedback

Under the structural problems sits a quieter, practical need: people want to get better and are not sure how. At least 9 asked for writing workshops, regular development spaces and, above all, honest feedback. A third (34%) struggle specifically with building material beyond ten minutes into a longer show. When you start out, self-assessment is all you have, and open-mic crowds are too unreliable to learn from.

### SURVEY RESPONDENT

"A safe space where you could post your rehearsed new material for a group of experienced comedians to view and give feedback."

## SECTION FIVE

# 05 Quieter signals worth noting

Some things came up from only a handful of people but matter more than their frequency suggests.

### RACIAL DIVERSITY

The clearest gap in the scene, named by several and confirmed by the survey's own make-up: only 3% of respondents were people of colour. Calls for outreach and real support for global-majority acts, and accounts of how isolating the scene can be for immigrant comics.

### MENTAL HEALTH AND BURNOUT

A few people described running "from work to comedy" until they are too exhausted to think, and asked for wellbeing support, including workshops built on sports-psychology ideas for handling a bad room.

### A UNION, OR SOMETHING LIKE ONE

Raised independently by three people: pensions, collective bargaining, "a proper performers' union, not a trade association." A sign of how precarious the work feels.

### AI IN PROMOTION, ACTIVELY DISLIKED

Two people volunteered strong feeling that AI-generated posters and promotion cheapen the circuit and signal that acts and audiences are not worth the effort.

### NON-STANDUP FORMS

Sketch, character, improv, prop and panel comedy feel neglected by a scene geared almost entirely to stand-up, with no obvious entry point for people who want to make something else.

### AGEISM AND DIGITAL LITERACY

Older comics noted the scene assumes everyone is fluent online, when much of it runs through Facebook groups and spreadsheets that exclude people who are not.

### CARERS AND SHIFT WORKERS

People with childcare or non-standard hours asked, repeatedly, for the same content offered at more than one time and format so they can actually attend.

## 06 What people said would help

---

We also asked, openly, what support or resources would help make the biggest difference, and people had clear structured answers.

### MENTORING, BY A DISTANCE THE MOST-WANTED THING

More than any other proposal, people asked for mentoring: a buddy system pairing established acts with newcomers, director and creative feedback, and structured development. Nearly half (45%) said one-to-one mentoring was a format that would work for them.

#### SURVEY RESPONDENT

"Would be amazing to have some sort of a mentor programme. I'd love to have someone tell me what to do."

### A WAY TO BE SEEN, AND A WAY TO FIND EACH OTHER

The top struggle in the whole survey was access to contacts and networks (66%). The fixes people proposed were practical: networking that is useful and unpretentious, a central directory or database of acts, an open and transparent way to reach bookers and agents, and better systems than the current patchwork of Facebook threads.

### MONEY WHERE IT COUNTS

Proper arts funding and recognition of comedy as a genuine art form. Help with the Fringe, which many now see as unaffordable and heading for a reckoning: funnelling local acts into affordable slots, and subsidy so that playing the big clubs all year does not mean being priced out every August. And plain financial guidance: budgeting, income planning, and an honest account of what a sustainable comedy life actually looks like.

### HONEST INFORMATION ABOUT HOW IT ALL WORKS

Under everything, a request to lift the lid: how progression works, how to approach bookers, what a producer does, how to tour, how funding works. As one person put it, "it's impossible to navigate a system when the rules and the economics are hidden."

## 07 Where this leaves us

---

The Scottish comedy scene is, on the evidence of the people in it, full of talent and genuinely supportive, and more diverse than it has ever been. It is also structurally stuck in a way that its own warmth cannot fix.

The pattern is consistent enough to state plainly. Getting started is easy and getting on is hard. There is a wall between open mics and paid work, a ceiling above club level that sends the successful south, and money running underneath all of it in a scene that is overwhelmingly working-class. Access, safety and racial diversity remain real problems, raised by people who clearly want to stay and make it better rather than walk away.

None of that is a reason for despair. People were not asking to be rescued. They were asking for a ladder where there is currently a wall, for honesty about how the industry works, and for the unglamorous infrastructure: mentoring, networks, fair pay, accessible rooms, the things that would let the talent already here go further without leaving. This report does not set out to solve those things. It sets out to say them clearly, in the words of the people who live them, so that anyone in a position to help is working from what the scene actually said it needs.

#### **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

Compiled by Brass Tacks Comedy from an open survey of the Scottish comedy scene, run June to July 2026, 77 respondents. Figures are drawn directly from the responses. Quotes are verbatim and unattributed. Shared in the spirit of asking the sector rather than guessing.