

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Culture

Draft Minutes

Tuesday 8th December 2020

Location: Zoom

MSPs Present: Claire Baker MSP; Maurice Golden MSP; Joan McAlpine MSP

CPG Members and Guests: 83

1. Welcome

Joan McAlpine MSP (co-convener) welcomed everyone to the meeting to discuss the Culture Counts Cultural Manifesto 2021.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved by Bill Armstrong (Writers Guild) and Maurice Golden MSP.

3. Culture Counts Cultural Manifesto: Party Representatives Discussion

Joan McAlpine MSP passed the chairing of the meeting to the group Secretariat (Jennifer Hunter, Culture Counts); to allow Joan McAlpine MSP to participate more fully in the cultural manifesto discussion alongside Claire Baker MSP and Maurice Golden MSP.

MSPs considered their top three Asks from the Culture Counts manifesto and answered questions from the group on topics including:

- The recognition of the contribution to the cultural sector from the grassroots and voluntary sector.
- Training for those with learning disabilities; solutions to barriers to covering costs/loss of earnings for stakeholders without interfering with the benefits system.
- The importance of improving the understanding of the economic value that the arts-culture and creative industries contribute to Scotland.

4. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is to be confirmed though all agree that a meeting in Spring next year would be useful to talk about the Cultural sector in relation to the upcoming Scottish Parliament election.

5. Anonymised Zoom Chat-Box Points

The following anonymised account of the chat-box from the event; ensures that the group have a record of the issues that people did not manage to raise in the main part of the meeting:

Cultural & Creative Freelancer Data

- We have little precise data on the cultural sector and creative industries and the freelance creative sector, which made it so hard to get emergency Covid funding to those that fell through the cracks.

It was suggested that a comprehensive survey of the cultural sector and the creative industries would be helpful in avoiding a repeat of people falling through the cracks but more importantly give us some sound bases for ensuring the long-term sustainability and success of the sector.

Although the individual creative industries unions have some data and would be willing to cooperate, the scope and cost of a comprehensive survey would be beyond them individually and would best be led by government.

Barriers to Inclusion

- One of the things that hinders those with disabilities being able to work in the creative arts is that they cannot be paid fees the same as the other freelancers in a company. The reason is that it interferes with the benefit system. We are looking to see a commitment to the introduction of a policy in Scotland that enables us to mitigate against the impact of the current system. What can the Scottish Government do to help change that system or create one which will begin to open up employment opportunities in the arts for those with disabilities?
- At the Scottish Contemporary Art Network we are asking this question about what grassroots might need. We've employed an artist/policy officer to identify what makes grassroots and voluntary thrive and what the challenges are, particularly in the visual arts.
- All MSPs pay much lip service to diversity but I don't see much evidence of it on screen in Scotland. You see evidence of it on BBC Networked programmes such as the excellent Small Axe dramas on TV reflecting racism in England not in Scotland yet it still exists here and particularly both in front of and behind the camera. The barriers to entry into the industry are huge even for Caucasian youngsters if they are not supported by their middle-class parents. We need to

take positive action, there is not even a black newsreader 45 years since Trevor & Moira appeared on our screens. Moreover, there is not even one Black MSP - perhaps it is time I made my move ! Ian Gray in the BBC Documentary "Children of the Devolution" had the good grace to say we as a government have failed in creating a diverse parliament!

- The large organisations and umbrella organisations can affect planning but individuals, struggling to make a living generally and especially isolated in rural areas, find it difficult to be heard. Is now a time when we can address this?
- I think there's a need for different, but equal, recognition and financial drivers to support community "everyday" and voluntary creativity which can get lost in the (also important and vital) conversations about creative professionals - both grassroots and bigger organisations. They are both equally vital and feed into each other of course in the ecosystem, and we've been doing some action research around this and cultural democracy for the last few years. Would be really excited to see more connections in conversations with what's developing around Universal Basic Income which supports both parts of the ecosystem.
- We've worked in community theatre for 25 years and are still not core funded. We are often seen as the "poor relations". Funding is very difficult to secure.

Economic Value of the Sector

- Some well-sourced figures suggest our economic impact is greater than that of the fishing, engineering and at least some other major sector combined, yet the vast majority of freelancers (up to 70% of the sector) have been largely totally unemployed since March, and the general perception is that we're just a frivolous afterthought, while the country gorges on Netflix just to maintain their sanity during the crisis, so significantly reducing potential costs re mental & physical well-being. We've heard constant media focus on football, hospitality and retail, but far less on this aspect, despite significant government support in Scotland in some respects, we need those with significant platforms to really impact the public discourse more about this for arts and cultural workers to feel more confident there is a future.
- After the 2008 crash, the UK film and television sector bounced back at 8 times the rate of the economy as a whole and the cultural sector in general at 5 times. The creative industries have the potential to powerfully fuel the economic recovery and contribute to the economy. Provided they survive the current crisis.

Covid-19

- In terms of COVID-19 recovery for theatres (not including direct funding and support for freelancers - which have already been discussed as important) - Insurance, business rates, rent and tax reliefs are all key to help with stimulus.
- I appreciate that we're looking ahead tonight, but it's worth highlighting that despite progress with a vaccine, there are huge numbers of musicians and other arts workers who are not even close to coming out of the other side. There's still almost no live music happening in Scotland, very little music education currently taking place and a huge number of people who work in this sector who have received NO financial support since the beginning of the pandemic. I don't believe we will be back to normal next year, and if we don't prioritise protecting those working in the cultural sectors now and in the New Year, there won't be people around to deliver cultural activities. Long-term recovery planning is important, but I would like to ask what will parties pledge to do to support individuals working in the arts and culture, so they don't have to leave the profession.
- I think we're at serious risk of wide scale de-professionalisation of the sector as people become less likely to want to bet their lives and livelihoods on this sector full-time anymore.
- Another major issue is the extent to which artists subsidise the sector, this is not sustainable, especially when as a result, huge numbers of creatives therefore don't qualify for UK Gov SEISS support, due to low income and portfolio income streams.
- It would also be good to see the Government recognising and investing in the arts and culture as part of the green recovery, alongside other sectors such as renewable energy and electric vehicles.

Fair Work

- Should Fair Work policy commitments in any culture/arts bill have effective oversight with clear consequences for those who fail to implement good practice?
- The issue is that industry rates are not as clear as many would like to imagine and in some ways our Unions are advocating for a lowering of freelance rights (for example pro-rata agreements in recent negotiations in order to get commercial productions back on their feet). Unions minimums are being treated as fair pay

and essentially, they are not. If our national organisations are paying wages that do not produce comparative annual rates, how can freelancers receiving £15k be expected to recognise fair pay when paying collaborators or themselves.

- A focus on growth totally overlooks the importance of depth. When talking about diversity, wellbeing or building audiences we need depth as it is about building trust with communities. We need to step away from the transactional nature of reporting and invest over long terms in culture as a part of society not as an economic driver. Take the Festival Fringe as an example, apparently it generates a lot of income for Edinburgh - where does this go? Who sees the benefit?

A Culture Act

- Culture is such a blanket term. There's obviously a place for big ticket culture, national companies, big festivals and the rest. I'm interested though in a potential Culture Act taking up the ideas in the Cultural Strategy around community cultural development and what has been referred to as 'everyday culture': a means of embedding artists in communities right across Scotland, enabling them to work with existing creative and cultural activity; encouraging participation with all of its benefits to individual wellbeing, and its benefits for community identity including the exploration of the tensions and contested issues there. We need this as well as the necessary support for mainstream cultural infrastructure, and ground-breaking individual artistic vision and work.

International

- If international cultural dialogue, cooperation, and exchange is important how can this be developed and supported?