



Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Economy

Kate Forbes

St Andrews House

Regent Road

Edinburgh

EH1 3DG

3rd March 2022

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Covid-19 Scotland's Strategic Framework

I'm writing in the wake of publication of the Strategic Framework. Culture Counts members are concerned as the document does not reflect the damage to the arts and culture across the four harms, which need serious focus in the coming period, beyond public health measures alone. Arts, culture, and recreation are the worst affected sector from Covid-19. The only reference to arts and culture within Scotland Strategic Framework is to note that the GDP in Scotland of arts, culture and recreation services reduced by 17.9% between February 2020 and November 2021 (the hardest hit sector on the chart).

There is deep concern about the future of management of the impact of Covid-19 on the arts and culture sector. As you will be aware the sector has complied in full, implementing measures as enforced by the Scottish Government throughout the pandemic, in a bid to ensure public safety. However, the sector has been damaged due the measures imposed, and as a result skilled workers have left the sector and are not planning to return. For those who remain, the majority work on precarious contracts and some of those with transferable skills are making the safe choice to leave the sector.

The arts and culture sector are a major tourist attraction for Scotland, contributing a great deal to potential for foreign inward investment and providing improved health and wellbeing and opportunities for connection and belonging at local level.

Confidence

Financial support for the sector has been very much appreciated, and we acknowledge the substantial inclusion of financial support to the sector to mitigate against the impact of Omicron. Though the sector also requires the same level of consideration offered to other workers. Scotland's Strategic Framework does not mention the harms done by previous lockdowns and closures or how we plan to mitigate against these in future. The Centre for Cultural Value has reported that those worst affected by Covid in the culture sector are women and young people. Furthermore, our sector has been identified as 'non-essential' for over two years. Identifying an entire sector as non-essential for years is going to have a long-term psychological impact.

What happens to the culture sector next?

If the Scottish Government continues the same methodology as applied the last two years, what will be the impact of that on other areas of Scottish Government policy?

- Fair work, will be unachievable and will go further into reverse, leaving more women, young people, a diverse workforce, and people with disabilities behind
- Rural population decline, creative and cultural workers struggle to survive in rural areas due to there not being enough opportunities to sustain a career, these creative people will leave and go to the cities and may not return
- Glasgow is in major decline, the report statistics say that Edinburgh is worse off, though the uptake of the return to offices and general participation in cities seems to be better re-established in Edinburgh. If Glasgow is in decline, the creative community will go to London, Brighton, Berlin. This is about vibrancy, if the city seems flat, the creatives will leave, and this includes international software developers.
- Tourists want to visit vibrant places; the culture sector is the vibrancy and the eco-system that provides a platform for the tourism and hospitality industry – arts and culture should be taken more seriously and treated less like an optional extra or a luxury when times are good.

Parity of Treatment

The arts and culture sector have implemented measures enforced by the Scottish Government, even though no sector specific evidence for the decision-making process has ever been provided. The sector as far as I know, was only ever given the reason 'for public safety'. This has led to the beginnings of a culture of distrust, and concern that the sector is simply an easy target for closure, particularly as many sports events were allowed when culture was not, a policy that arguably favours men's interests over women. Furthermore, there is a lack of parity between hospitality venues and culture: with small cafes, bars and restaurants being able to operate with no formal air quality standards enforced while small cultural venues are targeted for more rigorous guidance and licensing.

Continuous Damage

The sector now moves hopefully towards a time of recovery and rebuilding, while under threat of potential closure at any time. In conversation with our members, impact on the mental health of the workforce is clear to see. The wider figures from Chambers of Commerce for the leisure sector across the UK illustrate the difference in performance in Scotland (-16%) compared to whole UK (+9%) which is unfortunately conclusive about the economic damage done by the greater caution shown in Scottish Government regulations.

Future Damage Limitation

What can the Scottish Government do now to reduce the damage on the sector in future?

- Reduce instances of differing guidance for hospitality and culture
- Introduce a package of special measures within the abilities of our devolved status to stimulate recovery of arts, culture and recreation (the worst affected sector of the economy); including rates relief; abatement of local authority charges for events; support for organisations, freelancers and initiatives such as Scotland on Tour
- Retain free access to lateral flow tests for people attending events
- Retain free access to lateral flow tests for performing artists
- Increase and extend the venue ventilation and adaptation fund and align guidance with hospitality
- Support the building up of public confidence to participate in culture, improving opportunities for connection and belonging, working towards improvement in mental health
- Ensure culture workers traveling internationally for work are not subjected to expensive quarantine rules on arrival in Scotland
- Announce emergency funding at the same time as closure statements are made, ensuring thousands of people are not pushed into crises overnight again and again
- Introduce a fit for purpose affordable insurance scheme for cancelations, available to both artists and promoters, covering events and tours, and available as a stand-alone policy

Ten Year Economic Transformation Strategy

We note the recent publication of the Economic Strategy. We would appreciate if you would ensure that the newly structured NSET includes representatives from the arts, heritage, screen, and creative industries (including games). The work of Regional Economic Partnerships should connect to the work of the NSET. Aberdeen and Glasgow currently make no mention of Culture or Creative Industries in their future-plans, though seek to benefit from working in STEM and Tourism. There appears to be no acknowledgement or understanding from what we can see of the cultural eco-system, for example, that creative thinking and skills are needed for realisation of STEM and that tourists gain interest in Scotland due to the cultural offer.

Total exports from the Creative Industries growth sector stood at £4.1 billion in 2019, accounting for 4.7% of Scotland's total exports. Exports from this sector increased by 2.1% over the year. *(Growth Sector Briefing - Creative Industries. Office of the Chief Economic Adviser).*

Manifesto Commitments, Spending Review and Culture Recovery

Implementation of the SNP manifesto commitment to provide three-year funding settlements is vital for sector recovery. The three-year agreement(s) will provide sustainability (enabling partnership working linked to increased investment), the final figures should factor in no less than a 2% increase each year annually from 2022/23 to 2025/26 to ensure that the sector can begin to deliver fair work.

Local authority culture funding is in serious decline (Audit Scotland report a 13.9% reduction in investment between 2014 and 2019). Scottish Government should prioritise establishment of a "Percentage for the Arts" scheme which will create a requirement for a percentage of the overall cost of a construction project for new public buildings to be assigned to arts and culture. A minimum percentage of local infrastructure projects scheme could collect and ring-fence investment for local arts and culture and has the potential to raise £150m annually. Percentages collected should go into an endowment fund which is in-turn redistributed to local authorities for arts and culture activity and not for the purposes of community art commissions (which was Ireland's initial policy, before they realised that arts activity would be more appropriate).

I hope that the information provided in this letter is useful and that changes can be made to the direction of future strategic support. There is a need to provide recognition of the impact of measures enforced on the culture sector and to build confidence and renew a relationship of mutual trust and confidence.

If it would be useful to meet with representatives from Culture Counts to discuss any of the issues further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Hunter

Director

Culture Counts

On behalf of members

cc Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson

Minister for Culture, Europe and International Relations, Neil Gray