One hundred years ago Edinburgh was the publishing capital of the world. Today I will attend this committee as one of the last two substantial publishing businesses left. The processes of centralisation and homogenisation within the UK have continued and indeed accelerated since the revival of a Scottish Parliament. If a Scottish government cleaves to the view that ‘the larger the contract the less the price’ then, inevitably business whose scale is driven by a homogenised view of the UK, will triumph over businesses which assert difference. Size is all. Culture and by extension the ability to empower the cultural industries are already fully devolved.

That so little use is made of existing powers in terms of a) prioritising and promoting Scottish culture within existing spend b) creating a long term strategic framework of investment on which creative industries can rely and c) incentivising key cultural drivers such as lead authors to return to Scotland, has been dispiriting. That Amazon has been the sole major investment in the book supply industry indicates both a desperate paucity of vision and deep short termism in thinking. There is little reason to think that independence will make any difference to a deeply stagnant and conservative approach. However an enhancement of existing powers and a willingness to use them could provide very substantial help. The introduction of a Scottish Competition test (paradoxically tests exist at local and UK level but not at a middle level) might help protect cultural diversity. The willingness and the strengthening of planning policy to open access to UK retailers for Scottish suppliers would be of enormous benefit. Addressing the appalling procurement problems that Scottish businesses face is essential, and furthermore placing the promotion of Scottish identity and diversity at the heart of what Scottish government is about, not as an aspiration but as a monitored objective, would also yield very considerable results.

The English language market in books is a single market. I am dubious about an artificial border across a cultural union. What I am clear about is that within the benefits of that union it is possible to both use existing powers and further empower the Scottish government to celebrate the diversity of Scotland’s culture while keeping the benefits of that wider market.

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