

CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
CULTURE IN COMMUNITIES
SUBMISSION FROM FÈISEAN NAN GÀIDHEAL

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Fèisean nan Gàidheal offers this response to the call for evidence on Culture in Communities.
- 1.2 Creative Scotland's *Time to Shine 0-25 Arts Strategy* states: "The traditional arts sector and in particular the Fèisean movement spearheaded by Fèisean nan Gàidheal is looked at with envy from many other parts of the globe. There is much that Scotland's young people's arts sector can learn from it in terms of how it is networked, how it reaches out beyond its perceived usual participants, how it identifies and supports talent and how it supports the continued up-skilling of its workforce."

2 FÈISEAN NAN GÀIDHEAL'S CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURE COMMUNITIES

- 2.1 Fèisean nan Gàidheal's mission is *A' toirt ar dualchais do ar n-òigridh* (passing on our culture to our young people). The organisation is one of Creative Scotland's regularly funded organisations supporting a membership of 47 independent, local Fèisean which offer access to Gaelic arts in communities across Scotland.
- 2.2 We offer funding, officer support, insurance, musical instruments, training, teaching resources as well as compliance with child protection and other legal requirements.
- 2.3 Fèisean nan Gàidheal believes participation in cultural activities promotes equality and diversity, contributes to wellbeing and to the economy of Scotland. Fèisean nan Gàidheal has done much to promote a sense of place, linking young people with their culture, language and heritage.
- 2.4 For 40 years, the Fèisean have been tutoring young people in Scottish traditional music, Gaelic song and Gaelic drama now engaging with over 100,000 people annually. 116 FTE posts are supported by our programme, with a significant contribution from hundreds of individual freelance artists.
- 2.5 The current sense of vitality in the traditional arts and Gaelic language in Scotland is, in no small measure, due to the success of initiatives such as the Fèis movement. A report published by the Traditional Music Forum, following a 2015-16 census, found that 17,240 people under 18 were involved in learning traditional music, which meant our work accounted for over a third of all traditional youth music tuition in Scotland.
- 2.6 The interest and ability in Gaelic language and traditional music in Scotland has grown exponentially since the Fèisean began and they have been a driver in raising awareness and promoting the use of the Gaelic while contributing to community and social cohesion.
- 2.7 The creative, social, educational, linguistic and economic impacts of the work of Fèisean nan Gàidheal, and the network of Fèisean, has been widely recognised. Research has identified positive outcomes in individual and community confidence, skills development, job creation and equality of access to creative experiences.

- 2.8 It is interesting to observe support for more recent initiatives, such as Sistema Scotland, enabling Big Noise to work in socially challenged areas using classical music as the means of engaging young people in overcoming difficulties and building confidence in themselves and their communities.
- 2.9 What is less well recognised is the role the Fèisean have played in doing just that - using traditional music and Gaelic arts - over the 40+ years of their existence. Of 37 Fèisean within the area covered by Highlands & Islands Enterprise, 23 are in what HIE terms Fragile Areas. Those communities may not have the same challenges as Raploch, Torry and Govanhill, but they do experience socioeconomic deprivation which Fèisean have contributed to overcoming. Fèisean offer access to cultural activities in rurally isolated places and help increase income in areas where lower economic activity and higher unemployment may be a feature.
- 2.10 Fèisean employ hundreds of musicians and singers on a regular basis to teach in communities and schools. They have played a key part in producing a large number of excellent performers and players, some of whom are among the top-flight of Scottish musicians who make their living from performing and teaching Scottish traditional music and Gaelic song across the globe. They produce content that helps fill the schedules of radio and television programmes as well as contributing to the earnings of recording studios and record companies.
- 2.11 Fèisean also play an important part in supporting the Gaelic language skills of young people, and engendering positive attitudes towards the language among participants, with many having gone on to achieving fluency in Gaelic.
- 2.12 Fèisean deliver in the informal education sector, in their own communities. However, having also delivered traditional music lessons in schools for over 20 years, since the introduction of the Youth Music Initiative, Fèisean nan Gàidheal identified an opportunity to develop a formal education service. Fèisgoil was established initially to provide music lessons but, with the advent of Gaelic Language Plans, has been providing Gaelic language and cultural activities for schools and a range of local authorities as well as Gaelic Awareness Training to several public bodies.

In 2021, the Scottish Government approached Fèisean nan Gàidheal to devise and deliver a £322,000 programme - Treòir | Voar | Virr - offered to all islands schools in Scotland. In the wake of Covid, this provided employment opportunities for artists, as well as professional learning, while engaging young people in cultural activities relevant to their island communities. 1,390 pupils in 92 class groups within 80 schools in 6 local authority areas took part in a total of 1,656 sessions, with 61 individual artists employed.

The programme delivered the following outcomes:

- Creation of employment opportunities
- The transfer of skills as part of programme delivery
- Access to cultural and heritage education
- Re-training and/or skills development and employment opportunities for creative freelancers
- Training in creative content for classrooms and business administration made available for all tutors
- Education recovery associated with the COVID-19 pandemic
- Delivery of aspects of the National Islands Plan and
- Support for our island economies.

- 2.13 Our Blasad Gàidhlig (taste of Gaelic) provision has grown steadily over the past seven years offering local authorities the ability to introduce Gaelic as an additional language in schools or to supplement support where it is already on the curriculum as L2 or L3. Thousands of young people have been introduced to the language for the first time through our Blasad Gàidhlig work and over the past two years we have worked with a consortium of 8 local authorities involved in the delivery of Gaelic with around 2,500 children currently learning topic-based Gaelic online or in-person, mainly through the arts.
- 2.14 Over the past five years, Fèisean nan Gàidheal's Fèisgoil service has delivered Gaelic Awareness Training to a number of different public bodies and local authorities in support of their fulfilling obligations in their Gaelic Language Plan (GLP). Each organisation is different with specific requirements. Some require ongoing support while others prefer to access the service as an introductory approach.
- 2.15 The Fèisgoil service has been involved in *Beairteas* – Gaelic enrichment initiatives – including the running of a conversational café for teenagers and the production of a series of podcasts featuring some of those young people interviewing a range of people from various community and business backgrounds. School visits encourages inter-generational engagement, with community-based fluent Gaelic speakers matched with schools and community groups. Their richness of language, specialist knowledge of Gaelic culture and many other subjects about which they could speak in Gaelic, provides a valuable resource for pupils complementing the sterling work being done by teachers in Gaelic education.
- 2.16 Fèisean nan Gàidheal's FèisTV service streams live events to a wider audience and offers online lessons in traditional music with the ability to access tuition in Gaelic or English.
- 2.17 Our Gaelic song resource, Fuaran, encourages young people to research and collect Gaelic songs in their communities and offers them the opportunity to record new versions of them. For the 2020 Year of Coasts and Waters, with support from the Scottish Government, Fuaran created a new strand featuring some of the hundreds of Gaelic songs connected with that themed year.
- 2.18 Gaelic cultural activities attract local residents but, with VisitScotland finding that 1 in 3 visitors are interested in learning more about Gaelic when coming to Scotland, clearly there is potential to enhance the visitor experience. VisitScotland's Gaelic Tourism Strategy defines Gaelic, and its associated culture, as a unique selling point and authentic part of the experience of visiting Scotland.
- 2.19 Our work supports domestic tourism through residential events for young Gaelic speakers, including the language enriching 5 Latha in Lewis and an annual Gaelic Drama Summer School in Skye. Our Cèilidh Trails cater for visitors giving them an authentic flavour of Gaelic arts and culture through a programme of around 250 local events, as well as employment opportunities for young musicians. The annual Blas Festival, in partnership with The Highland Council, takes place in communities across the Highlands gives young musicians the chance to perform alongside some of the best-known traditional musicians and singers from Scotland and Cape Breton, normally drawing around 45% of its audience from outwith the Highlands and around 8% from overseas.
- 2.20 All artists are paid at least industry standard fees, all exceeding the Scottish Living Wage. The overall turnover of Fèisean nan Gàidheal and its member Fèisean is just under £3m which produces economic benefits in excess of that sum.

3 CULTURE IN COMMUNITIES

3.1 Fèisean nan Gàidheal and Fèisean in place-based partnerships

Although it has several definitions, the Gaelic word *Fèis* is synonymous with a network of community events through which young people engage with traditional music, Gaelic song and Gaelic drama. The *Fèis Movement*, as it has become known, has spanned three generations who have engaged in Gaelic culture with many having gone on to employment, full or part time, in the creative industries. Others have gained valuable linguistic and social skills through participation and enjoy being a part of Gaelic culture as audience members, parents, viewers of television and listeners of radio and recordings.

A Culture Strategy for Scotland (Scottish Government 2020) highlights the importance of recognising “each community’s own local cultures in generating a distinct sense of place, identity and confidence”. It also calls for the adoption of the Place Principle stating that: “Place - community, landscape, language and geography - is important and reflects the creativity of the past and provides inspiration for cultural expression today”.

The Fèisean do this well with the interest and ability in traditional music in Scotland having grown exponentially since their establishment. In addition to offering thousands of young people access to traditional music and song our work also supports Gaelic. It provides opportunities for language acquisition and use through the arts, contributing to linguistic performance and confidence, supporting language enrichment for pupils in Gaelic education and access to the language for thousands who are not.

Many places in which Fèis activities take place are considered important for a variety of reasons - the environment, the level of provision of arts in the community, the economic circumstances of an area or the health of the Gaelic language. For young people to understand who they are they need a sense of belonging, values, beliefs, identity and expression, the promotion of which has been a key success of the Fèis movement in line with UNESCO’s definition of intangible cultural heritage.

Fèisean nan Gàidheal sees its role as supporting local communities to deliver what they want, within the parameters of the understating or what is a Fèis and in line with agreed broad aims and objectives. Fèisean nan Gàidheal is governed by representatives of those communities and local committees make decisions about the cultural activities in which they engage. They are very much rooted in place, often utilising songs, tunes and stories from their own locality.

Investment in Fèisean nan Gàidheal enables cultural activities in more than 200 communities across Scotland. Membership supports 47 independent, local cultural organisations with a range of services, without which Fèisean would have to make provision on an individual basis.

One measure of the success of the Fèisean is the way in which they nurture young people, teach them skills, often transferable to supporting other community initiatives, before welcoming their return as tutors, performers and organisers. They are a positive force within their communities and demonstrate that their culture is essential to wellbeing and contributes towards the social, economic and environmental prosperity of their places.

3.2 Funding and challenges

Fèisean nan Gàidheal has built up fruitful collaborative relationships over many years and, as a third sector body, has built up experience in delivering outcomes for local and national government.

The organisation has been extremely fortunate to have had funding from Creative Scotland, and its predecessor the Scottish Arts Council, for a long period of time. The organisation also had long-term funding from Highlands & Island Enterprise and, in recent times, regular funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Fèisean nan Gàidheal delivers two service level agreements for The Highland Council. One supports the Fèisean in the area while another supports the organisation's delivery of the annual Blas Festival. Fèisean nan Gàidheal also delivers a range of activities in Argyll & Bute through a service level agreement with the council there.

Some local authorities support Gaelic cultural activities to which they have committed in their Gaelic Language Plans. In general, however, local authorities no longer support a wide range of cultural activities in communities. Several fund arms-length organisations which do, but this has removed accountability from elected representatives. There is a lack of planning with few councils developing and, importantly, delivering place-based cultural strategies or providing funding for cultural activities in their communities.

Challenges of standstill funding are exacerbated by local authorities renting schools for up to £5k for a two-day event. Just one of our Fèisean will be required to pay around £16k to the local authority to provide a venue for its year-round activity. Schools are often said to be community hubs and are certainly the only suitable space for Fèis activities, particularly in rural communities, but those unaffordable rental levels present a very real threat to community cultural activities.

It could be concluded, therefore, that different layers of government do not complement each other particularly well in ensuring communities have opportunities to take part in cultural activities. The pressure is on national bodies funded by the Scottish Government, such as Creative Scotland, Screen Scotland, EventScotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and others to provide funding for community-based cultural organisations. However, all of those bodies appear unable to satisfy demand within their current funding settlements.

While the organisation has been fortunate to have benefitted from investment by a range of agencies over the years there was a case for Fèisean nan Gàidheal's work to be recognised more formally, with funding in line with other national companies, articulated in Creative Scotland's Music Sector Review: "Notwithstanding the different organisational bases on which they operate they can only operate as long-term flagships and development organisations with some assurance of core funding. Five professional National Performing Companies are all permanently funded by the Scottish Government in recognition of their flagship status. Whilst not proposing that the national youth companies should be moved away from the aegis of Creative Scotland, we suggest it is reasonable that they should be seen in the same light as permanent national institutions."

A move towards permanence and surety of funding was never progressed and a lack of parity endures in the way national companies, as well as some other organisations, are funded with most organisations which form the Scottish cultural infrastructure competing for diminishing funds from Creative Scotland and others.

In common with all of Creative Scotland's regularly-funded organisations, Fèisean nan Gàidheal has had standstill funding for 6 years. There have been welcome one-off sums from recovery funds, but the regular funding we receive from Creative Scotland is vital to supporting the work of a wide network of volunteers involved in running Fèisean across Scotland. It is also important in enabling us to lever funds from elsewhere.

With the cost of everything increasing, standstill funding is having a negative impact on our programme of work. We are committed to Fair Work and contractually obliged to pay industry standard rates to artists. On standstill funding, however, this commitment will inevitably mean delivering fewer activities with a corresponding decrease in employment opportunities for freelance artists in order to accommodate appropriate rates of pay.

3.3 Demand and opportunity

It is becoming increasingly challenging to maintain that which has been built up over the past four decades, never mind meeting demand for growth. To enable the community Fèisean to meet current demand and keep pace with cost increases would require a 70% increase in funding to them.

One thing we learned from the Covid pandemic is the extent to which participation in arts and Gaelic cultural activities contributes to wellbeing, a point acknowledged in the 2021 SNP manifesto: “the pandemic has demonstrated more than ever how vital it [culture] is to our wellbeing, mental health and sense of belonging”. During that period, Fèisean nan Gàidheal did all it could to ensure artists had regular employment and we are playing our part in ensuring the arts and education recover from the pandemic.

Cuts to YMI funding and Creative Scotland’s revenue budget, however, proposed in advance of the recent Scottish Government budget, would have stalled recovery. The fact such cuts were proposed at all contributes to a feeling of fragility and uncertainty in the sector.

With challenge comes opportunity and we believe the value of arts activities needs to be recognised now more than ever. In line with the spirit of commitments made in *A Culture Strategy for Scotland*, better support is needed for the cultural sector as a whole on the back of recognition that funding for the arts is a real investment in communities with the potential to generate significant cultural, economic, social, linguistic, wellbeing and educational benefits for the people of Scotland and those who visit our country.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Gaelic culture is unique to Scotland and important to the economy, providing jobs, contributing to equalities and wellbeing as well as language revitalisation. Despite progress, Gaelic remains fragile and momentum is vital with every effort needed to ensure the language, and its associated culture, has a viable future.
- 4.2 Fèisean nan Gàidheal welcomes the Culture in Communities focus of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee and supports better recognition, and increased funding support, for community-based cultural activities.
- 4.3 We would be happy to give further evidence to the Committee at a later stage of the inquiry.

Arthur Cormack

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