

FST submission to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Culture in Communities inquiry

Introduction

5. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

6. What is your, or your organisation's, local authority?

National organisation working across most local authorities in Scotland, administrative base in Edinburgh City

7. Name of organisation

Federation of Scottish Theatre (FST)

8. Information about your organisation

FST is the membership and development body for professional dance, theatre and opera in Scotland, bringing the sector together to speak with a collective voice, share resources and expertise and promote collaborative working. FST represents over 200 members. This encompasses professional organisations and individuals - from national performing companies to individual artists creating their own work, and the independent producers who support them. We count all of Scotland's professional producing companies as members as well as members who provide support to parts of the sector or work in different ways to create, develop and produce live performance for audiences and participants across Scotland, in the UK and overseas.

9. Tick the following statements that apply to you.

Other

FST, as a professional membership body, represents a diverse range of organisations and individuals based in different geographical areas across Scotland: large urban areas, other urban areas, small towns, and small rural areas, varying from accessible to very remote¹. Our members also engage with communities of interest not defined by geography. This includes disabled people, the LGBTQI+ community, people from the global majority, older or younger people, or those facing deprivation or other social challenges, and which intersect with one another and with geographical communities.

Without exception, our members' work actively engages with people in their communities. This ranges from co-creation of projects; breaking down physical, social, financial, or personal barriers to attendance at and participation in existing cultural provision; work in multiple settings across communities such as schools, care homes, prisons etc.; offering physical services in venues such as warm spaces, subsidised meals, and spaces to meet to create community activity; and involvement in creative placemaking. Our members and those of the wider performing arts sector are involved with initiatives such as Creative Scotland's Place Partnerships, Culture Collective, Glasgow Life's Artist in Communities programme, Remembering Together, and similar initiatives across Scotland.

In preparing this submission, we convened a short consultation with members which resulted in a rich discussion with many views and ideas being shared, as well as examples of good practice happening across Scotland at different scales of operation.

¹ Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification.

In response to the specific questions posed:

How do national and local layers of government, along with the third sector, complement each other to ensure that communities have opportunities to take part in cultural activities?

While the question illustrates the vital and positive interconnectivity necessary for genuine and productive community engagement in culture, this is something of a loaded question. The use of the word 'complement' is perhaps over-simplified. The assumption that there is one clearly shared objective - to ensure that communities have opportunities to take part in cultural activities - between the different layers or partners, does not necessarily reflect practical experiences. In reality, those relationships and the cultural activities that result from them are only possible because of a monumental in effort in relationship building, fundraising from multiple sources, navigating different objectives and outcomes of partners, engaging in different evaluation and reporting mechanisms, and in sustaining and financing this over time.

FST members work directly with Scottish Government, Creative Scotland and other Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), local authorities, cultural trusts and other Arm's Length External Organisations (ALEOs) as well as both being part of the Third Sector and working alongside and in partnership with other third sector organisations. Members also work with grassroots community groups or organisations that may not be formally constituted.

The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework and Culture Strategy were seen as positive starting points, and high-level in aspiration and intent. There are questions about how the national connects with the local. Currently, the routes, pathways and roles of individual organisations or practitioners aren't as clear as they could be.

The scarcity of specific local authority cultural funding over the last decade, and recent cuts across local authorities in Scotland, is keenly felt. This is also the case for the loss of arts development teams and individuals and lack of availability of previously affordable space within local authority facilities. This can force cultural activity into direct competition with more traditional 'front line' services for communities. While the performing arts contribute to an exceptional range of different outcomes² beyond the essential cultural value they bring, these contributions aren't always recognised by funders or key decision-makers when making choices between different activities.

It remains that the provision of cultural services is not a statutory responsibility, nor is it fully rights based. Decisions about cultural funding and provision are at the discretion of short-term priorities by elected members that can frequently change (priorities, politics, and people.) The acknowledgement by the Scottish Government and its agencies that long-term, sustained investment and support is necessary for ensuring that communities engage and benefit from cultural activities can be undermined by short-term priorities and project funding which responds to specific issues where culture may not be the driver.

The majority of FST members are registered charities so are themselves part of the third sector where the availability of local authority funding generally is also increasingly limited. While local authorities may be offering asset transfer opportunities, third sector organisations may not have the necessary resources to seize the opportunities that could bring.

Members also work alongside and in partnership with other third sector organisations. Positive partnership relationships include those with, for instance, Barnardos, Gingerbread and many others. There is a deep legacy and a great desire for cultural projects to support, highlight and connect with other social issues and community needs such as housing, health, education, and fair pay. Likewise, some of our member organisations are the central

² The economy, community-building, place-making and regeneration, health and wellbeing, tourism, Scotland's national and international reputation, and a more environmentally sustainable Scotland.

location for civic identity in their local areas. They are impartial stakeholders, creating a space for essential community conversations.

How is unmet cultural need determined? And who decides this?

This question led us to discuss definitions of culture and of cultural value. We recognise that creativity is happening everywhere and that a huge percentage of the population already participates in cultural activity. According to the Scottish Government's Performance Framework indicator for culture, "2019 data show that around eight in ten adults (81 per cent) in Scotland had had attended or visited a cultural event or place of culture in the last 12 months." While the pandemic was devastating for a sector that has live performance at its heart, the reliance on creativity and cultural experiences during lockdown highlighted the intrinsic value and benefits of participation.

We discussed the pitfalls of an approach that takes a narrow view of culture or cultural provision and 'redistributes' it according to this view, without the genuine needs and tastes of communities being taken into consideration, or thorough mapping taking place that respects existing provision in whatever form that takes. There is concern that cultural need can be defined by what the funding priorities or available resources are and, therefore, those define cultural need. It was agreed that it was important to create spaces where need can develop organically.

The relationship between artists and communities (artists often being based and embedded in those communities already) coming together to co-create or form their own priorities or projects was discussed at length and seen as a crucial and critical element in developing need from a positive perspective, rather than a, "lack of," standpoint.

Like our response to the following question about what good 'place-based' cultural policy looks like in practice, strategies for meeting or developing cultural need should be genuinely responsive to local communities, and allow that need to develop over time, rather than as a response to crisis or available resources.

What does good 'place-based' cultural policy look like in practice?

1. It is long-term

One of the over-riding themes of our discussions was the issue of longer-term working. This covered almost every aspect of the interconnectivity described in the first question: strategy, planning, policies, resource management, funding, partnerships, and the activity itself. Members discussed, "the curse of the new," where sustaining activity over time to evidence the real benefits of the intervention is less attractive than new projects.

We discussed the importance of long-term anchor points for people in communities where, if they are unable to engage immediately, know that the organisation or the activity is consistent and will be there for them. The, "stop-start," nature of projects and initiatives may have resulted in much excellent engagement work being overlooked and people's lived experience of engagement not fully recognised or appreciated.

2. It respects the specific context and history of the place and its people

A point was made about recognising and sustaining the organisations and people which made the place originally, to continue to place-make.

Engaging as an audience for entertainment should be seen as equally valid as any engagement in participatory work, or activities entirely driven by communities for communities. Otherwise, this overlooks the interconnectivity between artists and communities (who are often the same people) and the contribution made by organisations who might be funded, for instance, by Creative Scotland.

3. It is genuinely collaborative and consultative

“Good place-based strategy is a process of identification of the local organisations, groups, education organisations, voluntary groups and public health and local authority services and agencies, participation in place-based groups, networks, strategy development, partnership working to develop responsive arts programming, creative learning. To do this, the cultural Third Sector groups need capacity to manage partnerships, to develop projects collaboratively. We need capacity for fundraising jointly and we need specialist training in community development approaches for artists and practitioners to be continual, to ensure all entrants into the cultural workforce gain insights and understand process led, engaged practice.”

We discussed various stake-holder engagement processes, including Falkirk Council’s Public Art Strategy which involves community engagement from development of the brief to installation and this being an example of good practice. The companies Active Enquiry and Tortoise in a Nutshell have developed powerful and clear engagement strategies with their local communities.

4. It recognises the vital dynamic between artists and, and in, communities

Engagement between artists and communities in the cultural sector has been happening for a long time in Scotland with enormous intrinsic and instrumental benefits (see examples below.) The creation of the Culture Collective illustrates this at scale across Scotland. Many of our members are actively involved and have been enabled to progress work that, as described within this submission, would have been highly complex and more challenging to navigate.

5. It is sufficiently and effectively resourced

Inconsistent availability of funding puts the work described in this submission seriously at risk. As we have previously stated to Scottish Parliamentary Committees, public funding for the arts is relatively small and in decline. Total funding for the arts in Scotland is much less than 1% of the total budget. Whilst FST members welcome the Scottish Government’s support for arts and culture, Creative Scotland’s practice of allocating flat cash funding, on standstill for most recipients for many years, is effectively a cut in funding. More than two-thirds of our regularly-funded members receive the same cash award from Creative Scotland currently as they received for 2015-18. For several, this is the same cash amount as their grant in 2010 when Creative Scotland took over responsibility for funding. Project-funded organisations and individuals, as just the agile and flexible partners needed for the community work described in this submission, are in an extremely precarious financial position.

Additional Culture Collective funding and various recovery funds responding to the COVID crisis allowed relatively fast, responsive and straightforward funding to be allocated that, subsequently, organisations were able to use in response to community need with clear, shared objectives. Crucially, in many cases, funding was in place prior to undertaking partnership negotiations. Trust in the process and the organisations to deliver was high.

“Funding shouldn’t just support output of creative work, but slower working to enable better listening.”

Additional quotes from the consultation

“Arts funding and strategy needs to be happier with arts organisations collaborating with schools. Children are the best connected people in communities, and therefore such a useful group of people to work with to reach wider communities with culture. There is research around climate action that shows that when it engages children and young people, it engages more people across communities.”

Examples of good practice

There is a wealth of good practice available across FST’s membership. The following are a few examples:

[ACTive INquiry](#) enables grassroots communities to make and use excellent theatre as a catalyst to uncover and challenge injustice.

Since 1999, the [Citizens Theatre](#) has regularly invited non-professional performers from all walks of life to take to our famous stages and be a part of their story. Since that first production, they have produced 50 community productions, from full-scale plays on the main stage to intimate shows in the circle studio. Participants have also taken part in international festivals in Edinburgh, Sweden and Rotterdam.

[Culture Collective](#) (Gaiety Theatre and Independent Arts Projects)

[Cumbernauld Theatre](#) has a process of consultation with the community, audiences and local groups, alongside participating in other community led consultation exercises to identify local community development 'needs' and critical issues and challenges. The Theatre has developed a response mechanism, where community representatives make up working groups who deal with all aspects of governance including creative production, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion and arts development and engagement. Staff collaborate in each working group, the WG's report to the Board and the Board instructs the Chief Executive Officer and staff team. The system is collaborative and empowering, so that the work of the Theatre is representative, relevant, engaged and embedded with the locality.

[Dumfries Theatre Royal](#) is the oldest working theatre in Scotland. It has strong associations with the renowned Scottish poet Robert Burns, who wrote several pieces specifically for its stage. It is the home of the Guild of Players and engages actively with its community.

[An Tobar and Mull Theatre](#) has a vision, mission, artistic policy and set of values that illustrate the interconnectedness of their work and the community.

[Tortoise in a Nutshell](#)'s aim is to bring people together, open up artistic opportunities and defy the expectation of space and language on stage. They create accessible, engaging experiences for our communities. We continuously challenge ourselves and the way we think, ensuring we stay relevant and impactful for the people we work with and for

[Scottish Youth Dance \(YDance\)](#) was funded by NHS Health Scotland to run Free to Dance (F2D), an initiative with a vision to enable teenage girls (13-19) to become more physically active and to realise their potential as individuals through a positive dance experience.