Written submission from Federation of Scottish Theatre, 21 September 2026

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

The Federation of Scottish Theatre (FST) is the membership and sector support body for professional dance, opera, and theatre in Scotland. We advocate, connect across, and lead necessary change within the performing arts, enabling a thriving sector that that is integral to a vibrant, diverse, and equitable Scotland.

We represent around 200 members from across the Scottish dance, opera, and theatre landscape, ranging from individual artists and producers, small scale companies, through to large venues and National Performing Companies.

As a member of Culture Counts, FST supports their evidence submission. Culture Counts' recent Culture Spending Tracker analysis demonstrates that, while spending via Creative Scotland has increased in recent years, it has been undermined by cuts to local authority culture budgets, leading to an overall cut in culture spending across Scotland since 2013. FST supports the broader sector-wide case made by Culture Counts, including on Open Funds, artists and freelancers, National Performing Companies, and the combined impact of Scottish Government and local authority spending

Our submission focuses specifically on what Budget decisions mean on the ground for the performing arts sector: whether work can be developed, produced, toured, and presented; whether venues remain viable; whether audiences can participate; and whether sustainable employment is being created.

Recent investment has brought welcome stability to the sector, but it has not yet translated into economic growth. Our evidence sets out why we believe this is the case.

If you would like any further information about any of the following, please contact Kenny McGlashan (CEO), [redacted]

Our Asks Ahead of the 2027-28 Budget:

1. That the Scottish Government clarify whether the promised £50m uplift in the Programme for Government truly represents **new increased spending on culture**, rather than reassigned culture spending from local authority budgets and standard adjusting for inflationary increases.

2. That the Scottish Government **protect current Multi-Year Funding commitments**, address the continuing impact of cost pressures on funded organisations, and provide a timeline on the funding period beginning in 2028-29, to allow our sector to plan appropriately.

3. That the Scottish Government **establish a sector-wide development plan**, tying in infrastructure investment, support for touring, audience development, and workforce training with existing frameworks such as the Culture Strategy, and ensure this strategic direction actively underpins and informs decision-making across Creative Scotland, the National Performing

Companies, local authorities, and other portfolios.

4. That the Scottish Government ensure future **funding settlements properly reflect the cost of Fair Work, EDI, and environmental investment** for the sector, because these aims are more difficult to deliver on when funding is limited.

Our Evidence:

As an example of the economic impact of the performing arts, the theatre landscape in Scotland directly accounts for a direct Gross Value Added (GVA) of £102 million. The total turnover related to theatre activities amounts to £436 million and the wider theatre sector accounts for **a total GVA of £234 million**.[1]

18,849 workers in Scotland are supported by activities related to the theatre ecosystem.

Scottish audiences spend approximately £276 million on tickets for theatrical performances every year, and **for every £1 spent on tickets for performances, there is £1.44 spent outside the venue**, contributing to the local economy.

Scotland has approximately 7% of UK theatre assets but **contributes 10% of the UK theatre turnover and GVA**.

These figures are from 2023 research, so represent a post-pandemic landscape which is still changing.

Funding Uncertainty

However, our sector has still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Across our venue members, we had **14% fewer performances in 2025 than 2019 and 12% less ticket income** when adjusted for inflation.[2] Fewer performances mean fewer opportunities for artists and freelancers, less work available to tour, reduced choice for audiences, and less earned income for organisations to reinvest.

The average yield per ticket remains the same as our members are trying to keep tickets affordable for a wide range of audiences.

We have also seen a **notable drop in ticket sales and performances from 2024 to 2025**, which we know has been reflected in other statistics across the Culture sector provided by Culture Counts.

We suggest this reflects the combined effects of funding uncertainty, constrained programming capacity, audience behaviours, and wider economic pressures. This includes the uncertainty and delays around the MYF process; the temporary closure of the Open Fund for Individuals; and the decision to fund MYF organisations less than they applied for. **Ticket income fell by around £4 million**

[1] Figures from 'Economic Impact Assessment of UK Theatre Sector', conducted by Sound Diplomacy on behalf of UK Theatre and The Society of London Theatre, (June, 2023).
[2] FST's internal research with The Audience Agency and our membership. Further details can be provided on request.

from 2024 to 2025 against this backdrop.

That is less money flowing into our sector, and therefore less investment for future projects. The further impacts of people choosing to leave the sector, work not being made, and organisations closing their doors are almost impossible to quantify in the long-term.

Our members across Scotland have a huge role to play in economic development, but they can only do that with **stable and reliable investment**. Shows take time to develop and programming happens well in advance, so unexpected funding changes can have impacts for years.

Capital Investment

We also see ongoing issues with **the lack of capital investment for venues**. From venues struggling to make the appropriate updates for climate resilience, to venue closures, this impact will only grow without intervention. Venues, production and touring capacity, and audience access are inherently connected: without viable spaces to rehearse, produce and present work, that work cannot be made, toured or seen.

While we welcome innovative policies such as the pilot of a Minimum Income for Artists, **the basic need for spaces is unavoidable**. Performing arts must be performed somewhere, and those venues can and should be vibrant parts of their local economies. We see a lack of rehearsal spaces as venues have to prioritise ticket sales above development, and a lack of investment into multi-purpose spaces.

Rather than ad-hoc responses to emergency situations, we ask the Scottish Government to **work with the sector to develop a cohesive development plan and recurring investment programme**, addressing maintenance, accessibility, environmental adaptation, and the availability of rehearsal, production, and performance space.

Workforce

Fewer performances and productions mean fewer paid opportunities for artists, freelancers and technical staff. Sustained financial pressure also limits organisations' capacity to invest in training, progression and workforce development.

We ask that future funding settlements properly reflect the cost of Fair Work for the sector, and provide **sustained, coordinated investment in technical skills, freelance careers and wider workforce development**.

Strategic Decision-making and Budget-setting

We welcome the commitment that Creative Scotland will develop a new strategy.

However, this strategy sits within a wider landscape of National Performing Companies, local authorities, and cross-portfolio culture work, which also needs to be covered by **cohesive, strategic decision-making** at a governmental level.

We ask the Scottish Government to establish a clearer approach connecting its Culture Strategy, future cultural legislation, and budget decisions across Creative Scotland, the National Performing Companies, local government and other portfolios, so that budget decisions can be made in line with national objectives and set the trajectory for the whole sector.