

Written submission from National Theatre of Scotland, 22 September 2026

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Submitted in advance of the evidence session on 29 September 2026, at which Liam Sinclair, Executive Director and Co-Chief Executive, will represent the company.

Summary

National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) is a national resource. We have no building of our own; our stage is the whole country. In our first 20 years we have performed in every one of Scotland's 32 local authority areas, and in 2026 alone we worked with more than 90 partners, from the Scottish Parliament and NHS Lothian to village halls, schools and more than 30 venues from Shetland to Stranraer.

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase culture funding, and its indication to the Committee on 8 September that it intends to give the National Performing Companies (NPCs) a more significant uplift in 2028-29, linked to wider work in schools and health settings.¹ That is work we already do and want to do more of.

The challenge is timing. Our core grant has fallen in real terms over the last 10 years, and on a standstill grant we are currently projecting a budget deficit of £423,000 for 2027-28, the year before the that uplift is expected. We ask the Committee to recommend that the 2027-28 Budget confirms the NPC uplift and a multi-year settlement, provides transitional support so that reach is not lost in the meantime, and funds the new National Performing Company for Traditional Music in addition.

This submission is made by NTS. The pressures it describes are shared by all five NPCs.

A national theatre without walls

We were founded in 2006, deliberately without a venue. Instead of one stage in one city, we make theatre with and for the whole of Scotland, touring it to city stages, arts centres, village halls, schools, hospitals and civic spaces, and taking Scottish stories to the rest of the UK and the world. We are a registered charity, directly funded by the Scottish Government, and one of Scotland's five NPCs.

In 20 years we have presented 347 productions in 1,716 venues, reached 2.3

¹ Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, Official Report, 8 September 2026 (draft), evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic and Scottish Government officials, including the quotation from the Chief Medical Officer's annual report.

million audience members, toured to 26 countries on 5 continents, and won 125 awards. *Black Watch*, *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*, *The James Plays*, *Adam*, *Our Ladies of Perpetual Succour*, *My Left Right Foot: the Musical*, and *The Fifth Step* are among the productions that have carried Scotland's stories around the world.

Because we have no home venue to fill, our resources flow outwards: to the venues that present our work, the artists and freelancers we employ, and the communities we work with. In 2025-26 we employed 369 freelance artists, creative and technical workers. Productions are made at Rockvilla, our creation centre in north Glasgow, then travel across the country. In 2025-26, we delivered 335 performances to 120,317 audience members in 59 venues across Scotland, the UK and Internationally. Of the 193 performances in Scotland, NTS visited 12 local authority areas, and 24% took place outside Scotland's four largest cities.

What that resource has delivered so far in 2026

Theatre for everyone, at every scale. *The High Life*, a new musical reuniting the original cast of the 1990s BBC Scotland comedy, played No.1 theatres in Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness, Edinburgh and Glasgow, took £1,98million gross at the box office and won Best Ensemble at the Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland. *Stand & Deliver: The Lee Jeans Sit-In*, the true story of the Greenock women who took on a multinational corporation in 1981, toured to 10 venues from Glasgow to Tobermory before a homecoming in Greenock. A new production of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* opens in Edinburgh on 2 October before touring to Glasgow, Aberdeen and Pitlochry.

Health and wellbeing. *Trolleydarity*, with NHS Lothian Charity: Tonic Arts, brought one-to-one sensory theatre to patients who could not leave their beds, and to the staff caring for them, across four NHS Lothian hospitals. *Caring Scotland* recorded the testimony of 100 care experienced people, creating a permanent free archive at the National Library of Scotland, a touring photographic exhibition, and *One Hundred Voices*, an immersive installation which premiered at the Scottish Parliament during the Festival of Politics, won a Fringe First and is touring Scotland until 10 October. The Chief Medical Officer has described arts organisations as public health assets.² This is the kind of work he means, and we would welcome the chance to extend it.

Children, young people and learning. Theatre in Schools Scotland, our partnership with Imagineate, has toured to schools in every local authority for ten years. This year it is free to participating schools, bringing more than 100 performances to over 13,000 pupils. *The Next Stage* is opening secondary pupils' eyes to careers in the creative industries; The Portal, our free digital resource for schools and youth theatres, continues to grow. As of April 2026, we have 774 Portal users with 14,213 total page views. We continue to host an annual national skills development conference for drama teachers.

Scotland's stories, voices and talent. *Through the Shortbread Tin* explored the

² Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, Our Path Ahead: Annual Report 2025–2026, 19 June 2026, Chapter 3.

myths and contested histories of Scottish identity in Scots, Gaelic, English and BSL, was selected for the Made in Scotland showcase at the Edinburgh International Festival Fringe, and toured heritage sites with Historic Environment Scotland. *True Story* invited the whole country to choose the real-life story we stage next. *Future Acts*, six short films with BBC Scotland involving 90 artists, is giving theatre-makers screen credits and reaching new audiences, and *The Fifth Step* went from the West End to cinemas worldwide through NT Live, with returns reinvested in new work. In 2025-26 our audience for cinema and NTS screen work was 120,372. Meanwhile, our Fellowship and South Asian Project are opening routes into the sector for the next generation of artists.

A partner to the whole country. Our 90-plus partners in 2026 included civic and national institutions such as the Scottish Parliament, the National Library of Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, NHS Lothian and Who Cares? Scotland; BBC Scotland and NT Live; more than 30 venues and co-producers; festivals and artist development organisations; and more than 20 trusts, foundations and corporate supporters. Public investment in NTS reaches well beyond NTS.

Economic and wellbeing value. An independent assessment by BiGGAR Economics found that in 2024-25 the five NPCs together generated £60.6 million in Gross Value Added, supported 1,280 jobs and contracted more than 2,300 freelancers. Every £1 received from the Scottish Government generated £2.62 in GVA and a further £1.75 in wellbeing benefits.³ Our work contributes across the Scottish Government's proposed revised national outcomes: to a **connected** Scotland through civic and community work, to a **healthy** one through our work in hospitals and around wellbeing, to a **skilled** one through our schools programmes and employment of freelance artists, to a **prosperous** one through the economic value the NPCs generate, and to a **sustainable** one through the touring model that brings work to audiences where they live.

The financial position and the case for a new settlement

Our grant has fallen significantly over the last 10 years in real terms. The 2025-26 uplift of 4% went some way to restore the funding reduction made in 2015-16, and in real terms (CPI) our current level of grant is around 24% lower than in 2016-17.

Costs have risen faster than funding. We have absorbed increases in employer National Insurance, our commitments to the Real Living Wage and Fair Work, higher fees for freelance artists and crew, and rising touring costs including transport, accommodation, materials and energy. The predecessor Committee recognised that such pressures mean additional funding can be

³ BiGGAR Economics (January 2026), *Scotland's National Performing Companies: Economic and Wellbeing Impact Assessment*, Annexe A to Finance and Public Administration Committee paper FPA/S6/26/2/1, 13 January 2026.

absorbed by costs rather than improved outcomes.⁴

Income is harder to grow. Box office, co-production and performance fees, Theatre Tax Relief and fundraising make a substantial contribution (projected 39% of overall income in 2026-27), but they vary with the programme and cannot replace a stable core. On tour, box office is shared with presenting venues; without a venue of our own we have fewer routes to building a donor base; and trust and philanthropic income is increasingly competitive and focussed on small charities. Our commercial approach to *The Fifth Step* shows our appetite to generate new income, but it adds to public investment rather than replacing it.

Touring is under pressure across the UK. Arts Council England research (the most robust recent research of this kind) found that touring plays in England fell by 64% between 2019 and 2024, and that most touring organisations analysed were operating at a loss.⁵ The *Theatre in the UK 2026* report found that 51% of subsidised theatres forecast an operating deficit this year.⁶ Touring to smaller towns and rural communities is most at risk, and that is the work that makes a national theatre national.

Why 2027-28 matters. We welcome the Government's detailed work with each NPC and its intention to provide a more significant uplift in 2028-29. But on a standstill grant we project a deficit of £423,000 in 2027-28. Without long-term support we would have to reduce the scale and reach of our programme the year before that uplift arrives. Capacity lost in 2027-28 would be slow and costly to rebuild.

The case for direct, multi-year funding. The NPCs carry a national remit across every part of Scotland and internationally, with clear accountability to Ministers and Parliament. Our work is commissioned and co-produced years ahead, and depends on stable, long-term funding; the predecessor Committee repeatedly called for three-year settlements for directly funded bodies, and the former Cabinet Secretary told Parliament in March that he favoured multi-year funding for the NPCs. NTS supports public service reform that renews and strengthens national cultural provision.

The National Performing Company for Traditional Music. We welcome its establishment. We ask the Committee to seek assurance that it will be funded in addition to the uplift for the existing five companies, so that a new national company is not established at the expense of those already delivering for Scotland.

⁴ Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee (21 November 2025), *Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2026-27: Funding for Culture*, paragraph 21.

⁵ The Audience Agency for Arts Council England (April 2026), *The State of Touring across the Performing Arts Ecology*. Covers touring in England to venues of over 150 seats.

⁶ Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre (March 2026), *Theatre in the UK 2026*.

Recommendations

We ask the Committee to recommend that the Scottish Government:

- a) uses the 2027-28 Budget to confirm the more significant uplift for the NPCs signalled for 2028-29;
- b) provides transitional support to the NPCs in 2027-28, so that reach and capacity are not lost before that uplift takes effect;
- c) concludes its consideration of multi-year funding for the NPCs and agrees three-year settlements from 2027-28;
- d) confirms that the National Performing Company for Traditional Music will be funded in addition to the uplift for the existing companies; and
- e) recognises the NPCs' artistic and cultural value, as well as their contribution across portfolios, including health and wellbeing, education, and Scotland's international profile, and sets out how cross-portfolio investment could support that work, additional to core grant in aid.