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Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 11 March 2021

Session 5

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CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
9th Meeting 2021, Session 5

CONVENER

*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)
*Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
*Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Isabel Davis (Creative Scotland)
Iain Munro (Creative Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Herbert

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee

Thursday 11 March 2021

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Cultural Sector (Impact of Covid-19)

The Convener (Joan McAlpine): Good morning, and welcome, everyone, to the ninth meeting in 2021 of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee. We have received apologies for the meeting today from Beatrice Wishart and Christine Grahame.

The first item on the agenda is evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on Scotland's cultural sector. I welcome the witnesses: Iain Munro, who is the chief executive of Creative Scotland; and Isabel Davis, who is the executive director of Creative Scotland and head of Screen Scotland. Before we move to questions, I invite Iain Munro to make a brief opening statement of no more than three minutes.

Iain Munro (Creative Scotland): Thank you, convener, and good morning, everyone. We are pleased to be able to give evidence to the committee this morning. I realise that this is the last public meeting of the committee in this parliamentary session, so I want to take the opportunity to thank the convener, the deputy convener, all committee members past and present, and the committee clerks for the important work you have been doing in support of Scotland's creative and screen sectors over the past four years.

The focus of this session is on our response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which we are dealing with daily. In our submissions to your inquiry, we set out a timeline for the actions that we have taken in response to the pandemic, all of which have been aimed at alleviating, as far as possible, the negative impact that Covid-19 has had on Scotland's creative and screen sectors and the people who work in them.

When the reality of the pandemic became apparent in March last year, with the support of the Scottish Government and the Big Lottery Fund, we quickly adapted Creative Scotland's and Screen Scotland's operations to focus on the delivery of emergency support to those who needed it.

We moved into parallel tracks. The first track continued delivery of on-going support to our established funds such as regular funding and open funding; targeted funds such as the youth music initiative; and funding for screen production, skills development and our focus on expanding Scotland's studio infrastructure. The second track focused on securing and delivering emergency support through new funding streams such as the bridging bursaries, hardship funds for creative and screen freelancers and emergency funds for cultural organisations and independent cinemas. Both tracks were and continue to be critical to providing support.

The scale of the work, although absolutely necessary and wholly merited, has been quite unprecedented. Since March last year, and by the end of this financial year in a couple of weeks' time, we will have delivered almost £75 million in emergency funding support in addition to the £90 million in on-going support that we deliver each year from the Scottish Government and the Big Lottery Fund. That amounts to almost two new emergency funds each month and the delivery of almost 12,000 funding awards to individuals and organisations, which is nearly 10 times what we would normally deliver in a year. That has been delivered at pace and with maximum efficiency from existing staff resources, while people are working from home and also dealing with their own personal challenges brought about by the pandemic. I publicly thank the staff of Creative Scotland and Screen Scotland for their impressive resilience, their relentless hard work and their enormous commitment in delivering all of that vital support—and that work continues.

As I speak, we are in the middle of delivering the latest round of hardship funding for creative and screen freelancers, using the additional £3 million provided by the Scottish Government last month. We are rolling out the recently announced £6 million culture collective programme, which reaches communities across Scotland. We have recently announced the recipients of £4 million emergency support through the second round of the grass-roots music venues stabilisation fund. We will shortly announce the recipients of the touring fund for theatre and dance, and we have just confirmed the fourth year of regular funding of £33 million to 121 organisations across Scotland. We are also discussing with the Scottish Government how the recently announced additional funds for culture from the United Kingdom Government will be deployed over the coming weeks and months. Therefore, work on addressing the pandemic is far from over.

The challenge facing Scotland's creative and screen sectors, as we move, I hope, to an environment of recovery and renewal, cannot be overstated. Creative Scotland's recently published

survey of the sector, drawing on more than 600 responses, makes for stark reading. It provides real evidence of financial loss, impacts on jobs, reduced creative work being produced and cross-sector concern for the future. All of that makes it clear that cultural recovery will be slow and will require continued investment and support. We should not expect the post-Covid cultural environment to return to where it was pre-pandemic.

The work on our strategic priorities and approach to funding that was undertaken in 2019 and the early part of 2020 was paused due to the pandemic. We are now revisiting that as the route map for moving out of the pandemic becomes clearer. We intend to finalise our approach and publish it as early as possible in the new parliamentary session. That will include a new approach to funding for individuals and a new approach to providing short and long-term support for organisations. The timing of that will, of course, be carefully considered to ensure a smooth transition from the existing funding model.

Our published research also demonstrates the important role that art and creativity have played in helping people through the pandemic, their importance to people in communities and how much people are looking forward to re-engaging with culture once the pandemic recedes. However, for that to happen, purposeful and sustained funding for creative and cultural recovery will be required over the coming years, if we are to maintain and develop Scotland's cultural strength—and there is real cultural strength.

The recent Nation Brands Index, published in February, which looks at the global reputation of different countries across the world, demonstrated that the most improved aspect of Scotland's international brand over the past two years has been its reputation for culture. Given the context in which we have been, that is nothing short of remarkable. It also demonstrates the importance of art and creativity not just to jobs, the economy, and our health and wellbeing, but to our international standing and our collective future.

There is clearly much to talk about, as is set out in our submission to the inquiry, but I will stop at this point. Isabel Davis and I are happy to take questions and look forward to the discussion. Thank you.

The Convener: Thank you very much. As you noted, this is likely to be our final committee meeting of the parliamentary session. It will certainly be the last committee meeting that Creative Scotland will contribute to, so I want to thank you and Isabel Davis for your co-operation with, your evidence to and your support of the committee over the years. It has been highly valuable, and I am sure that that will continue with our successor committee. I am also grateful for the submission that you provided for this evidence session.

The committee has had fairly positive feedback about Creative Scotland's response to the pandemic in distributing funds. You seem to have done a good job in distributing the funds, but how have you been involved in shaping them, and how will you continue to shape them?

Iain Munro: In the early weeks and months of the pandemic, we internally swung in those early moves to provide the initial support. As I noted in my opening remarks, that was a combination of our on-going commitment to and flexibility around the existing funding awards. We also put in place resources on our website to support people in finding access to other forms of support not just through us, but through other partners. You should bear in mind that, in the very earliest days of the pandemic, there was an expectation that the pandemic would have a certain arc that would begin to ease by the end of the calendar year. Clearly, that has not come to pass and we can talk more about that.

In those early weeks and months, we conceived a programme of support that was a combination of support for individuals and organisations, with forms of relief funding that would stabilise the situation, coupled with support for adaptation to a completely unprecedented environment. Another aspect was the combination of how to process those funds—if we were to secure them—through open application mechanisms, where anybody could make an application, and some strategically targeted funds. We engaged in conversation with Scottish Government officials about that over those early weeks and months. Of course, that predated the subsequent funding being made available.

To the Scottish Government's credit, it began to make moves using its own resources prior to the UK Government consequentials coming through, to support the bridging bursaries and the performing arts venues relief fund, for example. It was quickly after that—three days, I think—that the UK Government consequentials were made available. The consequentials that flowed in for all cultural support totalled £97 million. That was not just to cover support that would be channelled through Creative Scotland and our arena, but to cover museums and galleries, historic environment, heritage and events. Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government, with organisations in those other areas, were in conversation about how best to make use of that funding.

It is interesting to look for a moment at the UK context. As the committee will be aware, the consequentials that flow into Scotland are time

limited to the financial year in which they are made available. The value of all that investment from the £97 million-worth of funding, whatever proportion was coming through Creative Scotland, would need to be processed, committed and spent by the end of March—that was the end point of the value of that investment. I think that everybody was also paying attention to what other parts of the UK were doing with the investment. The equivalent in England, for example, was £1.57 billion.

Through our networks, we were tuned into partner organisations, to understand what they were planning to do. A stark compare and contrast became apparent. In our conversations with the Scottish Government, we were clear that we needed to provide support for individuals—and securing that on-going support is a big part of what we have been able to do. That has not been the case in, for example, England, where the vast majority of the £1.57 billion is in support of recovery funding for organisations. Almost immediately, we saw Creative Scotland's initial thinking informing and influencing what packages of support would be available in Scotland.

If I reflect back, we have seen a lot of support for individuals, organisations, open access funding, stabilisation and relief. We now need to pay attention to support that is for strategic and targeted approaches and about adaptation. Undoubtedly, the pandemic is going on much longer than any of us would have liked, and the impacts will be lengthy. It is a truism that the creative sector was one of the first to close and will be one of the last to reopen, in its fullest sense. Yes, sustained investment for relief will be important, but we must also look at funds that will be available to support recovery and, importantly, renewal. A lot of the conversations that are on-going are about how to influence the Scottish Government on that. Ultimately, however, Scottish Government ministers made the decisions about the purpose and priorities of those funds.

The Convener: Thanks very much. That is helpful. You talked about how individuals in Scotland get funding that individuals in the rest of the UK do not get. I note that, as you said, the latest manifestation is the recently reopened hardship fund for creative freelancers. I understand that that had to be paused after a couple of days because so many people subscribed to it. Can you talk us through how you intend to manage that fund? What are your reflections on the situation?

09:15

In a way, the fund reflects some of the things that we talked about a couple of years ago in our arts funding inquiry. We considered whether there should be a way of giving creative freelancers money that did not have strings attached—a way of allowing them to be creative without attaching the money to a project. Have you done any work on how the hardship funds have been used and how they might have influenced the cultural landscape of Scotland? Could you also address the fund being oversubscribed? It is clear that there is a great deal of need.

Iain Munro: There was quite a lot wrapped up in your questions; I will try to steer my way through them. I agree that the issues are all important.

I will address the question of demand in a second. We need to recognise that the hardship funds are a very specific intervention. They are about hardship relief: they make a contribution towards the personal costs of individual artists, creative practitioners and freelancers in the sector. There is no expectation that the funds will meet 100 per cent of individuals' needs, but they are certainly a particular way of recognising that they are important people who are part of a thriving cultural and creative sector that needs help and support.

It is also important to recognise that people who are creatively driven are compelled in their daily lives to continue to want to produce work. We are keen to make sure that we have avenues and channels of support available to them so that they can develop their practice, work in collaboration on new projects or ideas for the future or explore new opportunities.

Alongside the hardship funds—the earlier iteration was the bridging bursaries programme—we recalibrated the open fund very quickly. That was one of our first moves. That created a specific channel for individuals with the aim of supporting them in their creative endeavour. People want to be purposeful in their receipt of public funding. Hardship funds have a distinct place, which is about relief, but we also have other mechanisms to support people to develop their creative output.

With many of the other funds that have been channelled through organisational support, we have invited organisations to provide opportunities for active, productive work to support artists and the freelance community.

It is very clear that, for everybody, the pandemic is going on much longer than anticipated. We know from our own research, which is covered in our submission, that a lot of people have lost income—on average, they have lost £15,000 a year. We know that many artists and freelancers have portfolio careers, and there is, naturally, a lot of interest in the hardship funds. Including through the bridging bursaries, we have developed a digital transformational approach—in all this funding, we have accelerated our digital approaches to support—that took a light touch.

We simply invited people experiencing hardship as a result of Covid-19 to forward a simple online submission to which they attached a CV and a reference so that we could verify that they were an active freelancer in the creative community. That allowed them to request up to £2,000, plus access costs, if required. There was minimal fuss and bother in the way that people could access that funding and, because it was digitally supported, we could turn it around very quickly. Our target has been a maximum of six weeks and we have been able to largely deliver that.

The demand is undoubtedly still there because the pandemic is on-going and opportunities for creative work are still relatively limited. We have seen high volumes in all the hardship funds. In the latest round of the culture organisations and venues recovery fund, the volume hit more than £7 million in the first 24 hours and then £8 million in 48 hours, so we paused it to enable us to hold back some of the £9 million for those who needed a bit more time. The majority of applications—75 per cent-plus—are from repeat applicants, so they are from those who applied to previous rounds. Because it is digital, the process that we have built has enabled people who were already on our system to come forward again with minimal information, given that they have already submitted their CVs and we have already verified their reference and so on. We have been able to move very quickly to turn that around.

There are first-time applicants. Some people who may not have seen the opportunity previously or who may not have needed to access hardship support have now been given the opportunity to come forward. We are processing those applications with the intention of turning everything around by the end of March. The hardship fund reopens next Monday. We had always planned to keep it open until 22 March but, given where we are and the demand that we have seen, the expectation is that, when we reopen it on Monday, the balance of the £9 million—we have roughly £1 million available—will be eaten up quite quickly. We will do our very best to make sure that we continue to turn that around as quickly as possible.

The Convener: Thanks very much. I will come back to some of those issues later. I will hand over to Claire Baker MSP.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Good morning to Iain Munro and Isabel Davis. I have met Iain during the process—I have some questions for you, Iain.

You gave a helpful introduction to how funding decisions have been made. I want to ask about the culture organisations and venues recovery fund. That fund had a considerable sum of money, of which 27 per cent went to nightclubs and more than that went to what would be classed as the night-time economy. Therefore, a quite considerable share of the money went to that sector and 38 per cent of it went to Glasgow. At the same time, the Government announced a separate fund for nightclubs. How were those decisions made? These are not organisations that Creative Scotland has typically worked with—the same applies to grass-roots music venues. Was there enough capacity in Creative Scotland to make those decisions? Have any lessons been learned about working with a sector that is more commercial than the sectors you traditionally work with?

Iain Munro: Again, there was a lot wrapped up in your questions. I will try to make sure that I cover everything.

The vast majority of funds, including the culture organisations and venues recovery fund, have a core set of objectives at their heart. One objective is around protecting jobs and another is around preventing insolvency. Creative Scotland's brief should not be misunderstood in that we are not an organisation that purely operates in the subsidised sector—as fundamental as that sector is, of course. Our field of view looks across the spectrum of the creative economy and the creative industries, of which the subsidised sector is clearly a part. The new funds have enabled us to deepen and strengthen our relationships or to create new relationships with different constituencies that we would not ordinarily have had a relationship with.

It was a Scottish Government decision to include nightclubs in the brief for the scope of the culture organisations and venues recovery fund. Not for a minute do I imagine that nightclubs will remain a long-standing part of our work. However, when we were asked to accommodate them within the fund, we moved to find a way of making sense of that. It was about protecting jobs and preventing insolvency, as well as being agnostic in art form terms, if you like. To stay true to our brief as Creative Scotland, it was important to us that, as a key component of support for the creative sector as a whole, we found a way of making the fund relevant, in support of nightclubs.

The night-time economy team at Scottish Enterprise, who had a role to play as part of the running of the fund and the decision-making process around it, helped us to find a way of legitimately providing support through the fund to contribute to nightclub funding. That involved curated programmes of music. We are not talking about mixing desks or the jukebox in the corner, as such; we are talking about nightclubs where there had been a very creative approach to the programmes of music that they played.

The other observation about the culture organisations and venues recovery fund is that it was completely open access. It was about

protecting jobs and preventing insolvency, but its intention, like that for the majority of the funds—in fact, all of them—was not about addressing loss of income as compensation. It was about organisations' demonstrable need for funding to sustain themselves in the period of closure until they could return to trading again. Because it was open access, we could not predict where, geographically, we would get applications from or the type of organisations that would apply. They were all in the mix as long as they could satisfy the core eligibility criteria for the fund. We had a panel that, with input from partner organisations, made the decisions on those awards.

You may recall that we announced an initial significant tranche of decisions. We had more than 300 applications, and a small number required a bit more interrogation, so after the initial announcement, we did a bit more work on the residual numbers and made a second set of awards.

The culture organisations and venues recovery fund was all-encompassing, and I think that it definitely enabled us to see into different parts of the wider economy than we would ordinarily expect to deal with. The experience has been valuable, but we do not expect the relationship to come into Creative Scotland's brief in the longer term.

You mentioned the grass-roots music venues stabilisation fund, which is legitimately something for us to get involved in. I think that many privately run businesses that, outwith the pandemic, would not expect to have a relationship with us have welcomed the opportunity to create a connection with Creative Scotland. Although the grass-roots music venues stabilisation fund is about providing core support to stabilise the organisations that are being supported, it is ultimately about the work that they do to nurture and support talent in grass-roots music.

A complex mix of factors and considerations is involved in all these funds to make them run effectively. We have done our very best to try to afford the widest spectrum of opportunity while making sure that, through our own governance and processes, we deliver funds with maximum efficiency but also with transparency and accountability. That is why we have published the outputs and the data on our website.

Claire Baker: Thank you. That is helpful.

You mentioned that one of the purposes of the funds was to protect jobs, which is also one of the purposes of the theatre recovery fund and has been a core element of any funding pots that have been given out. However, there have been redundancies in the sector—I am perhaps more aware of them in the theatre sector. What discussions have you had with the unions? As a funder, do you put any expectations on organisations that receive awards that they should protect jobs and avoid redundancies?

09:30

Iain Munro: Your question about the unions is an important one. Part of the change that was under way for Creative Scotland pre-pandemic was about how we move to open ourselves up and engage differently and much more collaboratively with people, organisations, partners and stakeholders right across our remit. Right from the off and throughout the pandemic, we have made sure that we continue to cultivate our relationships with sector development bodies and unions, and we meet them regularly through various programmes. It is important that we have kept those channels open so that we understand what people are thinking and feeling, and what they want to feedback on and ask us about. That dialogue has been on-going. Understandably, we have had very clear feedback and engagement with the unions on concerns about the protection of jobs.

We recognise that the funding makes a contribution towards an organisation's costs, but we have not been under any illusion that, despite the scale of investment that is available, it is not able to address 100 per cent of the needs of many of the organisations that will benefit from that support. That is particularly the case in the performing arts, where the fragility of the business model has been exposed in terms of its heavy reliance on earned income as a major component. That was good pre-pandemic or outwith pandemic times but, when the pandemic hit, the challenge—the cliff edge that has been referred to—for many organisations was revealed.

In our regular funding of 121 organisations, we are a contributor to the overall costs of those organisations. Our regular funding on average—it varies by organisation, of course—is about 25 per cent of an organisation's overall turnover. In running the hardship funds, we are doing our very best to make meaningful contributions that will explicitly enable the protection of jobs and the prevention of insolvency, particularly in the performing arts venues relief fund. The third dimension of that fund was that it invited organisations to provide ways of sustaining opportunities for freelancers and the commissioning of work.

The performing arts venues relief fund was rolled out from last August and September. We built into it reporting from the organisations. We had some interim results in January; the full results will come in April, as the value of that investment runs out at the end of March. We will

also get results from the culture organisations and venues recovery fund in April.

I can tell you the interim results and what the projected results are, but it is important to understand that, in channelling that funding, we have done our best to be clear about its purposes and its requirements, but also to say that we are not shadow directors for any of the organisations. The organisations themselves take decisions independently for the businesses that they run in order to ensure that they have a viable long-term future.

We have tried to afford organisations as much opportunity as possible to protect jobs and prevent insolvency with the support we have provided—and it is only a contribution—but, because of business decisions, that support will not necessarily ensure that every single job is protected. So far, insolvency has been prevented but, as the pandemic goes on longer and unless there is further support, a number of organisations are ultimately at risk.

For completeness, the interim results that we got back show that, up until January, nearly 1,000 jobs have been saved and just over 2,000 freelance commissions have been made available through the performing arts venues relief fund of £12.5 million.

We will get the first returns from the culture organisations and venues recovery fund in April, but the value of that funding runs out at the end of March. In the organisations that have been supported through that fund, the projection is that nearly 2,500 jobs will have been protected. The figure for freelance commissions is projected to be 2,400. Significant numbers of jobs and commissions are in play here, but I do not underestimate at all that, on an individual level, some people working in those organisations feel at risk in some way. We are trying to protect every single job, but we cannot guarantee that we can do that.

Claire Baker: I appreciate how challenging this is. Does the data tell you how many jobs have been lost and how many redundancies there have been, or does it just say how many jobs have been saved?

Iain Munro: That data does not tell us that, although a sense of loss of income and loss of employment opportunities is emerging from the sector survey, which is also covered in our submission. That comes only from the sample of people who have returned the survey; we do not have a sector-wide understanding of that.

The Convener: This is all absolutely fascinating stuff, Mr Munro, but I ask you to keep your answers a bit shorter. A lot of members want to ask you questions and I want to give them all that opportunity.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I have a couple of questions, primarily focused on screen. I will address them to Isabel Davis in the first instance, but some of them probably cut across wider Creative Scotland reporting. I have the 2019-20 Screen Scotland business plan, which I think it is fair to say we were broadly quite enthusiastic about when it was originally presented to the committee. I also have the overall Creative Scotland report for 2019-20, but I am wondering whether there was a specific end-of-year report against the Screen Scotland business plan, because I have not been able to locate that.

Isabel Davis (Creative Scotland): No, you will not find that document. As Iain Munro has pointed out, and as we all know, this year has been about getting our sleeves rolled up, getting all hands to the pump and turning our tanks around on everything that we were doing last year. We have been as responsive as we can be in the moment. That is not to say that we cannot paint a really clear picture of everything that has been achieved in the past year, but if I think of the pace of change across our sector—perhaps we can unpack that during this session—we have come out of this year with an industry that has irrevocably changed. Some of that looks very positive, from the production side at least, but when you look at the way that distribution models have changed and the impact that that will have on content production across film, high-end television and local TV, we know that we are looking at a scale of change that will make us look very closely at that business plan and at how we develop our strategies for talent development, audience development, and skills development across the piece. We are very alive to the fact that, of the things that we were not able to do alongside distributing hardship funds and all the other interventions, plus scaling up the team, we put that to one side.

Ross Greer: Iain Munro wants to come in, I believe.

Iain Munro: Yes, very briefly. I think that you pointed to it, but the annual report and accounts, and the annual review for Creative Scotland, include sections specifically about Screen Scotland activity. I want to make sure that that has been noted.

Ross Greer: Yes, thanks. I have the annual report in front of me, although I could not find the annual review. The Creative Scotland website annual review section goes up to 2018-19, so if you have a copy of the 2019-20 annual review that you could send over to the committee, that would be appreciated.

As Isabel Davis said, for pretty much bang on 12 months, the priority has clearly been to support the sector, so it is entirely understandable that other work has been delayed. However, given that the committee is looking to tie up its work at the end of this five-year parliamentary term, it would be useful to know what the process and the timeline will be for, first, reporting against the 2019-20 business plan as it was published and, secondly, developing an updated plan.

Isabel Davis: You might be aware that we have now, happily, almost entirely restructured Screen Scotland and we have individual teams—they work together, of course—across scripted and unscripted. In skills development, we have a head of production who works across all teams, but is holding the centre on our skills strategy. We also have a head of audience development. We are now in a position to take forward the work of the business plan, which I think it is fair to say is a very good description of what we do and how we will measure it, and really get into the guts of what it will take to move the dial across each of those areas.

It is fair to say that skills is a huge focus for us, and we expect to get our strategy around skills together early in the next financial year. The skills strategy is a priority because, across the infrastructural piece and the key performance indicators and objectives there, we are doing quite well. I think that you will know that the Bath Road facility is now up and running with the "The Rig", which is a major high-end TV show financed by Amazon. That will start shooting in the next financial year. Bath Road is now established in the international market as a base for production, alongside a constellation of facilities, build spaces and purpose-built studios across Scotland. Of course, more recently we have seen that Kelvin hall will benefit from investment from the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council to provide an entertainment space for production, alongside an existing build space for production. That is in live use.

In infrastructure, we are doing very well. We now need to ensure that the absolute corollary to that is a strength and depth of crew that can support our efforts. That is a big focus for us. The work is at quite a developed level across the agencies that we work with as Screen Scotland, hand-in-hand with industry. We have some phenomenal skills providers in the new entrants training scheme, for example, and others that we are developing on a bespoke level for productions. We know that next financial year, as well as looking at how we can invest our budget in growing a skills strategy, we can look to partners and to industry to leverage everything that we collectively bring to encourage Creative Scotland's crew base. The role of screen in Scotland's economic recovery is incredibly important; it absolutely has to happen. We remain in a global race for an extremely valuable and growing market sector. We will take our place at that table through a close relationship between growing infrastructure and skills.

There are other areas to consider. We are also very focused on talent development, locally originated stories and locally developed intellectual property that is in the hands of Scotland-based companies. Again, that is the most important factor in our sustainability and is reflected in our KPI that we want to see more Scottish companies turn over more than £10 million in any given year. Televisual is the organisation that typically publishes the list of companies that are turning over £10 million, but I think discretion was the better part of valour in this current year and it has chosen not to publish the turnover of companies. As you can imagine, that is not necessarily something anyone would have welcomed.

However, we can look across Scotland's TV production company base and see real strength and growth across that sector in the success of, for example, Two Rivers Media. Your frequent witness Arabella Page-Croft's company, Black Camel Productions, has also done extraordinarily well. It made "The Brilliant World of Tom Gates", with Ken Anderson, the first 10 episodes of which were put out on Sky. The programme really found its audience and we are very excited about what comes next for that project.

09:45

Arabella Page-Croft has another project that we have helped to support called "Annika", which will bring another hopefully returnable drama into Scotland. There are signs of growth across the piece, and I think that we can feel pretty confident that there is a link between how we have supported productions through slate funding, individual project funding and the development of the crew base, and keeping those productions in Scotland.

You are nodding, Ross. I can keep talking about each of the areas of development that we are working towards so that you have a sense of where we will take each area of our business plan, but is there anything in particular that you want me to focus on?

Ross Greer: I am conscious of the time, although this is very interesting and, in general, I am very pleased with the progress that has been made, because this has been such an area of interest for us.

I have one specific request—I understand entirely if there is not a specific answer to it now—

which is for even just an indicative timeline for the publication of the updated business plan. That is the kind of stuff that we like to put in our legacy report so that we can signpost our successor committee to look out for it and to engage with you at that point.

Isabel Davis: I would like to signal that we are now in a position whereby each of the component parts of what it will take for the screen industry to achieve success can now take parallel tracks. Skills will be first out of the door, early in the next financial year, and I would say that talent development will not be far behind. Audience development would follow on from that. Audience development—by which I mean, in film terms, the exhibition sector—is obviously having a very challenging time, alongside theatres and other performing arts venues, with the huge disruption in the market around the collapse of effective distribution windows. Looking at how we develop audiences for TV and how we look at the challenges across the piece is something that will take third place alongside skills and talent development. Certainly, in the early part of next year, we want to see each of those strategies flourish, but probably each in their own right and not necessarily published simultaneously.

Ross Greer: Fantastic. Thank you very much.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I will focus on some of the practical elements around culture, not least because if anyone was asked to describe my engagement with culture more generally, the word philistine would come to the front of the queue. By way of exculpation, I point out that it is a three-hour round trip to the nearest cinema or theatre, so it just is not worth the hassle. Curiously enough I was at school with people like Lynda Myles of the Edinburgh international film festival, John Bett of the 7:84 Theatre Company, Artie Trezise of "The Singing Kettle" and Rab Noakes, who is still around doing his singing and composing, and perhaps a little bit off centre, Nina Myskow, one of the "Grumpy Old Women", who was in my chemistry class at school. That is neither here nor there.

We have touched a little bit on studio space. To what extent should we be looking for more studio space? It is a quite generic term because the whole of Scotland is a studio in a sense. For example, "Peaky Blinders" has just been up in Port Soy, in my constituency, filming for the next series. Port Soy was becoming Birmingham, I think, and somewhere in France, and shortly it will do something as a distant island. It is far from the only place where you could do that sort of thing. I understand, however, that the studio part of "Peaky Blinders" is somewhere down in England. We are not getting that bit of the business, despite the fact that the company was in the north of Scotland.

What more could we do to get some of the studio part of the business and to create opportunities for local people who might appear either behind or in front of the camera? I see Isabel nodding, so I suspect that the question is directed at her in the first instance.

Isabel Davis: It is great to know that you are an old friend of Lynda Myles, who remains one of the leading lights in the Scottish festivals. Her days at the Edinburgh international film festival are still talked about with great fondness as the halcyon days of celebrations of film.

You are quite right. Scotland has always shown off its many colours in many films. Locations are a particular strength for us and always have been. Even in the past year, we have seen first-time features such as "The Origin" shooting in Wester Ross. We have seen "Tetris", which is a big finance show starring Taron Egerton, produced by Gillian Berrie, repurpose Scotland for all sorts of different countries. We are an incredibly versatile, ineffably beautiful country that everyone would like to come and shoot in. We are very friendly to production. That is a historical strength but, exactly as you say, it is the studio element of those large productions that anchors the majority of spend, because the production base tends to be where the crew and the key creatives come from. That absolutely is behind our push to develop more studio space.

I will pause for a moment on the success of Bath Road, which is establishing a facility on the east coast for the first time. Through "The Rig" being established there, the crewing-up that has happened has allowed us to map where crew can be found in Edinburgh. That has been one of the takeaways for us on the screen side, interestingly, in tandem with the hardship fund: it has shown us how many people came home once we had the production shutdown. Scotland's crew depth is probably deeper than it might be in any other given year, because so many of our people are going where the work is. They came back during the pandemic and they have stayed, because the quality of jobs now available, through the infrastructure having been provided, allows them to build their lives here again. We have seen that even in the course of the past 12 months on the east coast.

Of course, we can look to Wardpark Studios, which is a great success story of how the vision to build a space has a huge impact on opportunities for local people. The fantastic efforts of the production teams at Wardpark, supported by Screen Scotland and Creative Scotland, have, over time, trained people up in very specialised

areas and in careers that, prior to that facility being there, they could not possibly have accessed.

You are absolutely right that there is a need for a range of facilities. We are stronger for having a variety of them and more of them. The more that we can build critical mass, the more that benefits the local crew and the more that benefits incoming production. Once they have established that a space is available, the very next question is, "How is your crew availability?" The two things work absolutely hand in hand. This comes back to the point about skills and developing a crew base around those facilities.

Do we need more? We could absolutely absorb more. The business is growing exponentially. The British Film Institute recently published UK-wide figures for production spend in film and high-end television for 2020, a year in which there was a complete production shutdown for several months, and then a slow return as issues around underwriting the costs of Covid and the cost of stops if Covid events occurred had to be sorted out. In fact, production spend in 2020 was £2.84 billion overall in the UK, which was down by only 21 per cent. Imagine if the pandemic had not happened; we would have seen huge growth. That is certainly our experience in Scotland, and it has been reflected by the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union's impression that we are as busy as we have ever been, so the opportunity to bring jobs into our sphere is something that we are very much alive to.

I mentioned our skills strategy and the investment that we are looking to put in and are looking to others to help us find. It goes hand in hand with initiatives that allow us to convert people from other industries that are not doing so well in these times. Theatre is an obvious one, theatre technicians being able to come across into film and TV with, for example, the help of the national transition training fund. That has been most useful to us. Even from construction or rigging, there are all sorts of ways in which people can enter our business. We certainly see the role of infrastructure in building that.

A note of caution is that there are certain conditions for a studio. As well as a building that is large enough and that has decent sight lines, is robust enough and has a degree of soundproofing, it must have other factors attaching to it, such as proximity to or the facility to travel to international airports, and infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants and so forth. We are in a pretty constant search for new buildings or buildings that could be repurposed. We are very happy to look and give our expert advice. When I say "our", I mean the team's advice. We have some brilliant people, including our head of screen commission, who is extremely well versed in assessing buildings. We can also bring in external expertise to the task of assessing the feasibility of a building becoming a studio. We are very open to it. We think that there is more that can be done.

Stewart Stevenson: Thank you very much for that. I should not overplay my relationship with Lynda Myles. I was at the biggest school in Scotland—our year was nearly 500 people—and, although I contacted her from time to time, we are not intimate friends, just to be clear.

It was interesting that you talked about construction as one of the skills that is behind the camera, behind the stage and part of a range of work. Forgive my ignorance, because I am going to ask a totally naive question. What is the ratio? There are the people you see on the stage and in front of the camera, but how many people, broadly speaking, are behind it and how many of the skills that are involved in that are deployable outside the creative arts, so that there can be a soft win? Someone with construction skills does not have to be working in theatre or films.

By the way, I am not such a philistine, as I personally do photography and art, and at least one of my cameras is always with me.

Do we have the flow of people coming in behind the scenes to make it all work? If we do not, what could we be doing about it? Is it about getting people who already have skills into the business? Is it about giving people some understanding of how they can run their own businesses as independent operators? Where are the gaps?

Isabel Davis: It is such a fast-growing industry that the gaps are everywhere. That is a very good question, and I think the answer is "all of the above" if we are to succeed in growing our skills base.

To answer your question about numbers, of course it depends on the budget of a production, but, if you have a $100 million production, you can be sure that there are hundreds of people working across the teams involved in making that production. You will have construction workers and plasterers who build the sets under the production design team—who are potentially very creative, artistic people, but who work alongside carpenters, plasterers and so on. You also have electricians, who make everything work on set. You then have the camera department, the production team, production accountants, drivers, hair and make-up professionals, and the costume team.

Even as I am alighting on a number of departments within any given film or TV space, you can see that there is clear opportunity for conversion from any other industry that might use those skills. That, indeed, is the strategy

underpinning where we think we need to go next. There are some well-established schemes that already do that, and they will call out to drivers, carpenters or ex-armed forces people for locations. There is quite a strong history of flow from a career in the armed forces into locations. If you have that sort of discipline and interest, and if you have a work ethic and you like working in a team, there is every chance that there is a job for you in our sector.

We need to get that message out there, because we will not be able to grow by just bringing new students through. That is therefore another key part of what we are looking to do here—that conversion drive, alongside bringing people through from higher and further education. Edinburgh College looks as though it could be a good source of new entrants into the business, especially in the technical grades. Further along the east coast, I am sure we will see growth and opportunity in many colleges.

That is very important to us, because we know that we will not be able to grow our crew base as fast as we would like to unless we are inclusive about the way in which we go about it. It is very important that our sector is representative of Scotland and that we remove barriers—which might be socioeconomic or geographical in nature—alongside increasing inclusion with regard to disability, ethnicity, age and so forth. That, again, is an absolutely integral part of how we are going about this recruitment drive.

10:00

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The question I was going to ask was the one that Stewart Stevenson has just covered. I will go back to something that I think has been covered slightly. I represent the Highlands and Islands, which is an area that is very rich in cultural and creative heritage. We rely on a lot of very strong local or regional-based facilities such as Eden Court and places within the isles. How can we be sure that they are not going to miss out? We all hope and talk about making sure that no part of Scotland is left behind and that no group is left behind. It is harder to deliver such facilities in those areas, but they are as important, if not more important. How can we make sure that they are not left behind?

Iain Munro: You raise an important point. I will say up front that we have a keen eye to understanding the support that we are able to provide in and alongside the support that others provide—particularly local government provision—and how all of that works together to make sure that we are purposeful in how we reach out, so that support is available to different communities. It can take different forms. We use all our digital media channels to communicate opportunities, be they funding opportunities or opportunities to access the expertise, skills and knowledge that our staff have. We are frequently—when we are allowed to, of course, outwith pandemic times—around the country very visibly, trying to actively engage at a local level.

We are also constantly looking to create opportunities to strengthen existing provision and protect it for the future, as well as exploring new opportunities. A good example of that is regular funding support for a key organisation nationally, not just regionally, such as Eden Court, which has connections right across the region and the country. The culture collective, which is one of the new funds that we have rolled out, is purposeful in its intent because it is about creating opportunities for artists and creative people to come together with communities, in communities, to support their ambitions.

The £6 million programme that we announced a couple of weeks ago will be rolled out over the next 18 weeks. It is absolutely about understanding those opportunities but also what works well and learning from those experiences across communities and across the artists, using that to inform what more can be done.

In terms of creative activity—Isabel Davis can speak in a second to how screen reaches out—we have a very keen eye to making sure that we are connected and that we network locally but understand how we can make purposeful interventions that afford local communities the opportunity to pursue their creative ambitions.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Thanks. Do you want to come in on that, Isabel?

Isabel Davis: Just to be opportunistic, we have to celebrate the success of “Limbo”, which was shot in Uist last year and which, yesterday, was nominated by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts for the award for the best British independent film. That is a huge success. Ben Sharrock is a local film maker who is from Edinburgh originally, but the film is set entirely in the US. He wrote and directed it with two fabulous producers, Irune Gurtubai and Angus Lamont.

To respond to an earlier point, I note that, in filming terms, Scotland gets used in its outer reaches. We also had a film made this year called “The Origin”, which was shot in the outer reaches of Wester Ross specifically because of that, and the production worked very closely with the local community. We see that quite frequently.

On Iain Munro’s point, the networking element of this is very important. It is something that we have built into how we work across cinemas with Regional Screen Scotland and with Glasgow Film. We also work with Film City Futures for our

emerging talent programme. Glasgow Film's contribution is specifically through its work with the cinema network across Scotland, activating that not only as a way of creating greater opportunities for audiences, but as a way of enabling people to come together who might have aspirations to become film or TV makers. That is an important network, and amplifying its ability to reach into those communities is one of the key ways in which we work outwith the central belt.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: That is most interesting. About two or three years ago, I was on our farm in Orkney and somebody was blocking our farm road. When I went down there, I found a group of actors and film makers filming a "Star Wars" parody or something like that in woods on the farm, which was a slightly odd thing to find.

We all have access to mobile phones now. How do you find and develop the talent that does not realise that it is talent—the individual who makes short clips and videos for fun but who has great skills, or, from the other side, somebody who writes poems and performs them in beautiful locations but who is part of a talented group of people that we probably do not access very often?

Isabel Davis: That is a very good question. You are so right: talent is everywhere, opportunity perhaps not. Our job is to ensure that opportunity stretches across and is made available to people. If we are talking about writer-driven material or directors in that sense, our script team looks after that, alongside short circuit, which is the programme I mentioned whereby we are working with Film City Futures and Film City Glasgow on the film side. We also have other initiatives on the TV side, not forgetting GMAC Film, which is a Glasgow-based institution that reaches out across Scotland to unearth new talent that is not found in the typical arenas in which people have grown up in the business. Often those are the most exciting voices—we know that it is the bit that makes our industry exciting. Scotland is going to succeed only if we are able to speak with an authentic voice. That is what brings audiences, in the end—that spark or originality, and ideally that swagger. We would like to see some confidence come through that creative pool.

As you say, the idea is that anyone could do it. There is something very democratising about the march of digital technology and the ability of people to understand that, with a mobile phone and a fairly rudimentary editing package, you can tell stories. The bar is much lower now in terms of getting access to the technology, but working with the Screen Academy Scotland network and the network of Film Access Scotland is very important. It is important that we look at the role that schools can play in switching people on to the idea that stories can be told through visual or audio media. We do not know what formats will look like in the future, so it is important to keep that sense of what a voice is quite open at that point. People can always specialise further down the line, but we know, through the pandemic, that the world needs stories and we will continue to consume them voraciously. We just need to make sure that we have given every opportunity, as you say, to people who have it within them to tell them.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: That is super. Thank you, both, for your answers.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Good morning, panel. I am thinking about how theatres and cinemas will reopen. Your submission says that

"nearly all organisations are concerned about returning to previous levels of revenue generation, prospects of remaining solvent and about public willingness to return as audience members."

To me, it is not just about the willingness of people to return as audience members; I think that one of the issues, going forward, will be capacity. I have raised that issue before in the committee. How are we going to address the issues of capacity and pricing mechanisms? I think there will be a lot of people who, like me, will be really keen to go back to theatres and cinemas once they reopen, but capacity may be limited such that we will have real difficulties in ensuring that the sums add up, so to speak—that they are viable. Pricing might also ensure that fewer people go to theatres and cinemas in the future, because of the restrictions. How can we address that?

Isabel Davis: I will speak mostly for cinemas, and maybe Iain Munro can talk about theatres. Every cinema in Scotland—and probably globally right now—is doing exactly those calculations and running those numbers. Cinemas were very quick to respond to the need for physical distancing, modelled at 1m, 1.5m and 2m distances. This has all had a pretty challenging effect on the bottom line. Interestingly, the model of a typical independent cinema is not necessarily to run at 100 per cent capacity, so some of it might simply be a technical challenge of making sure that the computer and box office systems are able to space people out appropriately. It is also about giving people confidence that they can come back.

We have received very strong evidence that there has not been a single global incidence of significant transmission in cinemas, because they have been able to work very much within the spirit and the letter of any safety guidelines—and, of course, most have air conditioning and so forth. It is a very hard question to answer. The very unpredictability of the situation plays into the instability of cinemas, but I think people will adapt.

At the same time, almost unrelated to the pandemic but necessarily accelerated by it, there has been the decades-long debate about windows, by which I mean the time between the cinematic release and the pay-TV release, the online release and so forth. Those windows have been closing for years, and we are now looking at a total collapse in that most distributors and producers are looking at day-and-date releases: simultaneous cinema release and home release. That is another aspect to this—the fact that the global models that underpin the entire sector will be changing. We do not understand the impact of that yet.

We have seen the big studios experiment with day-and-date releases, and we will have to see how it unfolds. In the meantime, there is no doubt that, if we want to see a flourishing cinema sector that is able to show us a range of diverse and interesting material outwith the studio system, we will need to support it. I very much hope that we all support that.

Kenneth Gibson: When I went to the Glasgow Film Theatre, it always seemed to be pretty busy. There has been many a movie I have wanted to see over the years that has been sold out, so I have not been able to get in, which is always annoying.

I am not convinced that spacing out the screenings of films will necessarily help. Surely, independent cinema will need long-term funding. There are issues about how you get into the cinema, 2m distancing and all that kind of stuff. Is it going to take twice as long? You talked about the time between screenings. It will take ages for people to get in and out of cinemas. Are folks going to have to wear masks in cinemas? If they do, I think I would rather just stay in the house, frankly, and I am sure that others would think along the same lines.

Is Screen Scotland having much communication or discussions with the private sector? Like it or not, the majority of people who go cinemas go to commercial cinemas—the big multiplexes and so on. What is likely to be the future there? How should the Scottish Government address both independent and commercial cinemas in order to provide long-term support? Undoubtedly, it will be financial, but there might be other ways of trying to ensure the long-term viability of those sectors—if, indeed, they are viable in the long term.

10:15

It used to be years before you would see a film on TV. As you say, they are now released more or less simultaneously. Do cinemas have a long-term future? There is a real concern, especially for me, about that. From the age of four or five, I went to ABC minors every Saturday, and that was a great part of growing up. I know that this has been a long-winded question, but I feel that many younger people will have missed out on that experience and will continue to miss out on it.

Isabel Davis: I am as passionate about cinema as you are. We can see that pent-up demand. People are really keen for that communal experience, and I think it will survive although it will go through changes. Those changes are inevitable—they were happening anyway—but I think you are absolutely right that we need to continue to support the sector through these uncertain times. I do not know that we will be looking at 2m distancing in the future. Obviously, one hopes that, with vaccination programmes, the restrictions will become less onerous over time, when we all feel safe enough.

All independent cinemas are private businesses that rely to a greater or lesser extent on the big titles that come out of the US, which are a key revenue driver for them, so the interplay between the studio system and independent cinemas is very much to do with whether there is anything to show that will bring audiences back and make them commercially viable. We know that cinemas such as Glasgow Film Theatre have been able to serve a local audience that has been consuming all the independent titles that it has been possible to release.

When cinemas were allowed to open during the past 12 months, it was quite a boost to independent cinemas that they were not competing with the larger studio titles. The studios had taken the decision to just remove those titles completely, because, when they hit, they need them to hit big. They will wait until such time as they have certainty about that. However, we are seeing signs that, in the later part of 2021, those titles will come back, which reflects an optimism that normal conditions will start to return to cinemas. Of course, we do not know that right now, and we will have to wait and see.

I do not know whether that answers your question. In talking about spacing screenings, I think you are right that it is about looking at the infrastructure of cinemas, some of which have very narrow corridors that make it very difficult and challenging to create a 2m distance. In certain cases, that has closed venues entirely, because they were not able to work with the conditions imposed on them. There is also the matter of the distance between seats. You are absolutely right that a big Friday or Saturday night screening will sell out. That will be problematic, but, if you look at the capacity, it is sometimes still profitable to run a screening at 40 per cent capacity. If that can be done while keeping people at an appropriate

distance, the impact will hopefully not be as severe as it might be.

Kenneth Gibson: The way things are going, Daniel Craig will be in a care home by the time the James Bond film comes out.

Is Creative Scotland addressing pricing, which is an important issue for theatres? Obviously, tickets for the opera and so on were very expensive, even with the subsidies, before the pandemic. How likely is it that prices will increase further and that, therefore, the potential audience base will shrink further? Should additional funding be provided, certainly for the foreseeable future, to prevent that from happening once theatres reopen?

Iain Munro: Further support is undoubtedly required. Earlier, I spoke about the extensive duration of the pandemic and said that it is taking a long time for trading conditions to re-emerge. Our tracking survey of the general population is telling us a couple of things that relate to what you have touched on. That is why we are keen to put the information out there and to engage with people on the issues, but it is undoubtedly the case that people cannot solve the issues without further support. That is what I mean about support for change and adaptation.

I can tell you what the survey data is telling us, because that absolutely relates to your question. In relation to age demographics, when it is possible for things to reopen, I think that younger people will come back more quickly than older people will. That is an issue of confidence. The older demographic is a key part of the core business models of certain art forms and activity. There is a spectrum, of course, but the older demographic is core to the business sustainability of certain art forms, so we should be concerned about how we support everyone so that they feel able to come back. The fact that it is technically possible for people to return does not mean that audiences will respond in that way, so it is key that we support people in keeping connected with their audiences.

The survey returns also show the role of digital versus the live experience. There is pent-up demand for the live experience when it returns, however quickly or slowly. One of the things about digital is that it works for some and does not work for others. When it has worked well, I think that many organisations will continue to use it as a key part of how they successfully deliver and reach out. There are great examples of organisations—Fèis Rois, Celtic Connections and, indeed, book festivals—that have been able to go beyond the live in-venue audience and reach international audiences. Such events have been really successful, but they do not work for everybody and are often hard to put on.

On your point about pricing, the other thing about digital events is that, generally, they are free. People are looking at how they can monetise them and so on, but there is a risk that people's habits might change through the extended period of lockdown. There is a concern not just about the speed at which people will re-engage and their desire to re-engage but about what they will be prepared to pay for.

Taking all of that into account, I think that we must ensure that we have support mechanisms in place to enable organisations to make things work while the long tail of Covid plays out. Given the length of time that it will take for audiences to fully re-emerge, and given that we are all now inhabiting a fundamentally different world, it will perhaps be necessary to understand different kinds of business models.

An awful lot of the answer to your question is about ensuring that, in the months and years ahead, there is proper thinking about the best response. Undoubtedly, financial support will be needed to enable people to work through that. If support is not provided and people do not return quickly enough or are not prepared to pay, many organisations might be at risk, because they are very fragile already, and there might be a loss of provision, which none of us would want to see.

Another—

Kenneth Gibson: One of the problems in attracting people to make a career in the cultural sector is that, at the end of the day, some people cannot see themselves being able to make a living in the long term. I have seen a number of people—even people who have tremendous reputations and years of experience at the top of their profession, let alone new entrants—wondering whether they will be able to survive.

You have made very important points. I am sorry for interrupting you, Mr Munro.

Iain Munro: No—I apologise.

I will say two further things. The question is rooted around performing arts, particularly theatres, with indoor venues and particular business models. It is important to note that other art forms and creative activities in different forums and settings are, in very large part, free. For example, I am thinking about the visual arts, galleries, workshop activity and so on. They are in a different context but will nonetheless still need support in order to reopen. It is not always just about ticket income in the overall equation; it is important to recognise that other forms of activity will also be keen to re-emerge and reopen.

My other point connects to your last point. All of this is of deep concern and challenging, but I want to flip to the other side of the coin and take the

opportunity to reflect on the extent to which, during the pandemic, people have, undoubtedly, turned more than ever to culture and creativity to be at the heart of their lives, to sustain them, to nourish them and to add to their health and happiness. That is something powerful to build on, and we need to keep an eye on it. We need to constantly make the case for support and resources to enable the recovery to take place. However, if we set out our stall and galvanise political will around a policy position that recognises the central role that culture and creativity have in people's lives—not just culturally but in relation to society at large and the economy—there will be something quite powerful for us to build on following the current investment.

The worst thing would be for the £75 million that we have channelled—it is probably double that if we take into account the wider cultural support for heritage and so on—to just disappear and have no value. The Screen Scotland case is a case study in having the proper political will, coupled with the right policies and the right people and resources, to deliver a step change in the fortunes of a particular industry or sector. I feel passionately that, despite all the adversity, culture and creativity could be and should be resourced at more appropriate levels. For the future, we should build on the very good and clear support that we have already received, because that will be a key part of the recovery of the country as a whole.

Kenneth Gibson: I have to say that I am depressed to some extent by what you said about seeing more through a digital experience. Nothing will replace going to a comedy club or a theatre, queuing up at a cinema and all the melee, with people milling around, meeting others and so on. We spend enough of our time staring at screens, so I hope that everyone will do whatever they can to ensure that we maximise live experiences as we go forward—particularly for younger people, who do not have the same memories that the rest of us probably have from many years of enjoying such experiences.

Iain Munro: It is a deeply human thing. As human beings, we must gather together to experience the live arts. It is fundamental to our being.

Kenneth Gibson: Absolutely.

The Convener: Our last questions are from Dean Lockhart MSP.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Iain Munro and Isabel Davis, thanks for joining us this morning. We have covered quite a lot of ground. I have one or two questions about festivals and the outlook for the possibility of holding festivals this summer; there are the Edinburgh festivals, but we are very lucky in having a huge number of other festivals as part of the calendar. Festivals take a lot of lead-in time to organise. Can you share your thoughts about festivals taking place this summer? You have spoken about some digital events and, hopefully, some physical events happening later this year. What are the prospects for some of those festivals going ahead?

Iain Munro: You are right to say that the planning horizons for the sectors that we work with are quite far in advance. We are almost running out of time for many of the summer festivals to be able to make confident planning decisions. Those decisions are appropriately informed fundamentally by the health restrictions that continue, which are ultimately what will guide the opportunity to reopen for the summer festivals onwards. In the conversations that I am involved in, some people want to be ambitious and confidently plan for the summer festivals, because that is what they do, but in this extended pandemic, as Mr Gibson said, we are all hungry to get back to being together in the live arts experience. Festivals are a big part of life in Scotland.

10:30

There is a big question mark over a reopening timetable that would give people enough confidence to be able to deliver something this summer. The majority of people have been aiming towards that with some hope but are not necessarily confident enough yet to make the call on it. I think that we are on the cusp of people having to make that decision.

One of the critical factors here is not to do with the reopening timetable and health restrictions and so on. Having insurance would help people to be more confident about moving forward with a festival. If, at the last minute, it was unable to take place, insurance would certainly help. Insurance has been a sector-wide concern, as the committee will be aware. There is no answer to that yet, but I think that it is a critical factor in enabling people to have more confidence in looking forward, whether it is to this summer or beyond.

The jury is out on the extent to which there will be festivals activity this summer, but there is undoubtedly an appetite for it from those who produce and present the festivals as well as from audiences. I am sure that there will be great uptake as and when the opportunities make themselves available, but I think there is something else to recognise about festivals. It is not just about the festivals activity itself; it is about the ripple effect that happens right across the economy for tourism and the visitor economy and so on. That is an important aspect of what people are thinking about, because to go two summers—

two years, in effect—without any meaningful festival activity is very hard for people to contemplate.

People's ambitions are also about what it says to the world about the cultural confidence of Scotland to be back in business again, with people productively able to do what they are passionately driven to do in terms of their creative output and engaging audiences with it. There is a lot still to play for, but we are now probably on the cusp of some critical decisions being taken on whether festivals are able to go ahead this summer.

Dean Lockhart: Thank you, Iain. You have covered a lot of important points there. As you say, we are three and a half to four months away from the summer, depending on how you define it, but, presumably, given the lead-in time that is involved, the go/no-go decisions will have to be made in the next month or so. What could the Government do to help with that critical decision-making process? Clearly you have highlighted the issue of insurance. People could invest a lot in planning things and then, if it does not happen for public health reasons, they will not be able to recover that finance and investment through insurance. What could the Government do to add a level of confidence and assurance to get people over that hurdle so that they can start planning?

Iain Munro: I have been reflecting on the psychology of the whole pandemic period today and thinking about the months ahead. There is a shift in psychology from where we have been—or, to a degree, still are—which is about how we keep people safe by keeping them apart and preventing the virus from spreading, to a position where it is about the prospect of reopening, in the light of the vaccine roll-out, which is clearly going very well. However, the virus will be with us for some time and will continue to need to be managed through some form of social distancing and health protection measures.

That shift in psychology is away from how we keep people apart to how we can safely enable people to come together to enjoy a live arts experience. There is a need for guidance that can wrap around the safe reopening of some activities, still compliant with all the health measures that are necessary, as well as support to enable people to safely deliver the product. There is also the insurance issue. Many festivals have been doing preparatory work, as you would expect, but the cost of gearing up with the possibility of a late cancellation exposes the businesses behind festivals to an inordinate risk, which they are probably, in very large part, not prepared to take. Insurance is therefore important.

The key things are really understanding how we can make it work safely—even if it is not for everybody—and managing the risk with support. That is part of the way forward to see the summer festivals take place, wherever possible.

Dean Lockhart: I could go on with a number of other questions, but we are slightly over time. I thank you and Isabel Davis again, and I hand over to the convener.

The Convener: Thank you very much. As Dean Lockhart said, we are over time, so I do not think that we have any time for any closing questions. I thank Mr Munro and Ms Davis for attending and for their evidence today. That concludes the public part of this morning's meeting.

As has been alluded to before, this is the last scheduled meeting of the committee in session 5. I would like to take the opportunity to thank members, both past and present, for their contributions to the work of the committee over the past five years. I also thank all our clerks and advisers for their invaluable help, as well as, of course, all the witnesses who have taken the time to give evidence to the committee. I wish you all well in the future.

We are going away now to sign off our legacy report. We talked about the value of culture earlier, and I think that the legacy report will reflect the fact that, despite Brexit and despite the Covid pandemic, which we have had to spend a lot of time on in the committee, we have devoted a great deal of time to the examination of cultural issues. I think that that bodes well for the future. Thanks again.

I will allow a couple of minutes for members to have a comfort break and move to Microsoft Teams before we resume the session. Thank you very much.

10:37

Meeting continued in private until 11:46.

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