Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

DRAFT

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Comataidh na Roinn Eòrpa, Cùisean Taobh A-muigh agus Cultar

Tuesday 29 September 2026

Session 7

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2026, Session 7

CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North) (SNP)
*Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
*David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
*Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP)
*Jenny Young (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Fiona Campbell (Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland)
Lucy Casot (Museums Galleries Scotland)
Veronique A A Lapeyre (Scottish Contemporary Art Network)
Kenny McGlashan (Federation of Scottish Theatre)
Alasdair Nicolson (St Magnus International Festival)
Joseph Peach (Culture Counts)
Liam Sinclair (National Theatre of Scotland)

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Tuesday 29 September 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good morning, and welcome to the sixth meeting of the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. We have no apologies to record for today's meeting.

The first agenda item is a proposal to take items 3, 4 and 5 in private. Do members agree to take those items in private?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Pre-budget Scrutiny 2027-28

09:30

The Convener: The main item of business is to begin taking evidence as part of our pre-budget scrutiny. I warmly welcome to the meeting Liam Sinclair, executive director and co-chief executive of the National Theatre of Scotland; and Lucy Casot, chief executive officer of Museums Galleries Scotland. Joining us online, we have Joseph Peach, director for policy and public affairs at Culture Counts. Thank you all very much for joining us.

I will open up with a relatively general question. We have a number of strategies in place. We have a culture strategy, an international culture strategy and a museums and galleries strategy, as well as high-level objectives in the national performance framework. Do we have enough to be confident that a rising trajectory of culture funding will lead to the results that the Government wants and that we all want? There is a cross-party welcome for the trajectory of funding, but are we confident that it will be used in a way that will achieve the intended results?

I throw that open to whoever would like to dive in first.

Liam Sinclair (National Theatre of Scotland): I think that we are on the right trajectory. There is no question but that we live in a country, and have a Government and a Parliament, that values culture—that is about the intrinsic value, the economic value and the policy value—and the contribution that it makes. All the frameworks and strategies that you mention point towards that. Where we have seen challenge over the past few years—as a performing company, we are in the midst of this—is around where the strategic drive meets the resourcing, and having a shared view on what the resourcing needs to look like to deliver on that. However, the metrics and outcomes that we are looking for are broadly there. It is about how we get, if I can use this analogy, the machine underneath it working in the most efficient and outcome-focused way to deliver against that.

Lucy Casot (Museums Galleries Scotland): I agree. A lot of good groundwork is being done. The culture strategy and the international culture strategy form a framework within which we have a museums and galleries strategy for Scotland, which is a sector strategy rather than an MGS strategy. That provides us with the framework for investment. I would like to come on to talk about how, within that framework, we are able to flex to the changing needs, and they have certainly changed since the strategies were written. The structure that they provide is absolutely relevant to

the changing challenges and opportunities that we have.

The museums and galleries strategy is a seven-year strategy, and we have finished the first three years. We are refreshing it right now with an up-to-date view of the challenges that face the sector and the opportunities that there are. That will be done through a three-year action plan, which we will launch in March for the second half of the strategy.

Agility is needed. The world is changing a lot faster around us, but we have done some good groundwork on which we can build, and I am happy to talk more about that.

Joseph Peach (Culture Counts): I broadly agree with Liam Sinclair and Lucy Casot that the direction of travel is now quite positive. However, there are three things to mention from a Culture Counts perspective.

If we think of investment in and delivery of culture as an ecosystem, one thing that is missing from the picture of how you bring it all together and make decisions on resourcing and policy is what is happening with local authorities, which are centres of investment and activity. Last year, for every £1 that the Scottish Government spent on culture, local authorities spent 70p. That is a huge bit that, in terms of parliamentary scrutiny and structures of government, sits in a different place, so it is challenging to join those dots and have a whole-system approach.

If the whole thing is an ecosystem, there is a question as to whether we have the right policy tools and an understanding of the outcomes of investment to let us make holistic and strategic decisions around all that. As folk will probably know well, over the past year or so, at Culture Counts we have been making the case for the development of cultural legislation that would do some of the work of bringing all that together. Moving in that direction in the longer term is probably the route to getting the best impact and value for money from cultural investment.

The Convener: It almost sounded as though you were finishing your response to my question by restating the question: do we have the right framework in place?

Our background briefing notes give some statistics about cultural attendance and participation levels. If we compare those with the aspiration in the national performance framework for culture to be something that the population widely enjoys and participates in actively, what is necessary between the Scottish Government making high-level budget decisions and that money being spent on the ground? What needs to be done to ensure that we increase the number of people, the range of people and the diversity of people who participate in and attend cultural activities, rather than simply making it easier or more attractive for people who already do?

Joseph Peach: There are a couple of aspects to that. Again, it comes back to local authorities, where a lot of on-the-ground stuff is delivered, and how you join up what happens there. The Scottish household survey shows us that the most commonly attended places of culture are libraries, which are primarily delivered by local authorities across the country. It almost feels like a separate arena of policy decision making and budget decision making from what we are considering here. How do you bring all that together well? Legislation could be a route to doing that.

The other thing is about how you tie investment to outcomes. Even when we talk about this aspect of the Scottish Government's culture spending, we have quite a broad understanding of what culture achieves and the different types of return on investment that it delivers. When making budget decisions, I do not know that we are able to be that specific about how much we have spent and how much more that has achieved in terms of outcomes. That is an area in which stronger policy connectivity would be quite helpful.

The Convener: That is the second time in the first 10 minutes that you have mentioned legislation, so I will note that the cabinet secretary seemed to indicate that introducing legislation is a long-term aspiration and that there is a commitment to consult but not necessarily to legislate in this session. Are you concerned about that being the timeframe that we are looking at for legislation? Is there a worry that there is a vacuum when it comes to the discussions that you have said need to take place to draw together a more ambitious approach?

Joseph Peach: Possibly. That is reflected in the written evidence that came in from the Federation of Scottish Theatre and the Scottish Contemporary Arts Network about the need for a development plan for the sector.

That recognises that there are big changes in terms of spending and strategic development in response to the Creative Scotland review and the recommendations of the independent fair work task force. The ask around a development plan for the sector points to the fact that change is happening in some places, but it is not necessarily joining up. Nothing happens in isolation. As we are moving quite quickly at the moment, it is about how all that joins up and comes together a little bit.

I do not know whether there is a bit of a short-term versus long-term aspect to this, because in order to do legislation well, you need time to consult widely, arrive at a shared vision and

progress towards it. At the same time, we need a more strategic approach and greater connectivity within this ecosystem. It is a question of balance.

Lucy Casot: The level of additional investments that are being made in culture, and the cabinet secretary's commitment to make further investment, is incredibly welcome. What we need to ensure with the next round of investment is that it is deployed strategically.

I am very pleased to be here to talk about museums and the museum sector today, because there is sometimes a visibility gap in relation to the culture sector as a whole. It is all interconnected, as Joe Peach said, but museums face specific challenges and we are keen to see the committee recognise those.

On the surface of it, Scotland's museum sector is fantastically successful. We have 450 museums all over the country delivering brilliant programmes. If you go into a museum, you will see local visitors learning about their history and visitors to Scotland connecting with the distinctive character of different places. You will also see children taking part in education programmes, and communities meeting through health and wellbeing programmes, all running in museums. However, that superficial success is masking a serious situation in the sector.

One of the things that we, as the national development body, are responsible for is understanding the challenges and the opportunities so that we can ensure that we are targeting our work. Every two years, we conduct a survey of our sector, and two years ago we reported to your predecessor committee. At that time, 11 per cent of the respondents to the survey felt that their museum was at risk of closing in the next 12 months. Two years on, we have not yet published our most recent survey results in full, but we have some headline findings. One is that 17 per cent of museum organisations now believe that a venue that they run is at risk of closure in the next 12 months. That is a very serious position that we need to grapple with, and some of those organisations run multiple museum services.

The second figure—I have four figures for you—is that 40 per cent of organisations have three months or less of reserves. Some organisations, as well as local authority services, cannot hold reserves. However, it is very precarious for an independent charity to be operating with three months or less of reserves. That evidence reflects what we have been seeing and feeling.

Two other headline figures help to frame the discussion. Museums are often housed in historic buildings. However, 52 per cent of organisations are not keeping on top of regular maintenance, and that challenge is growing. In addition, 38 per cent of museums and stores are in either poor or bad condition. That is a serious situation for organisations that care for our national collections on behalf of the people of Scotland, as well as delivering all the activity that takes place within those spaces. Decades of underinvestment have hollowed out those services, which is a serious concern.

I will move on to the strategic aspect of that. What do we do about that? We are really pleased to have the support of the Scottish Government for a new way of working. Our museum futures programme, which is a collaboration between the Scottish Government, Museums Galleries Scotland and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, is looking not just at funding crisis to crisis, or funding individual projects, but at providing holistic support for the museum sector. That provides an indication of ways of working that might be applicable elsewhere. We are about a year into the programme—it started last July. It is very much an exercise in active learning, as we draw lessons from the programme as it progresses.

The programme looks holistically at the needs of the sector and of each individual organisation, focusing not on the project that someone wants to run but on what is holding them back. What are the governance, leadership and skills issues? How do we give organisations the capacity to deliver the projects that they want to run and the interventions that they want to make, and how do we promote collaborative working across the sector?

We are looking at the sharing of resources. If we can get those foundational aspects right, we can move into a space of innovation and collaboration, which is a strategic way of investing.

It is a change programme, and we are really excited about it. We think that it has real promise, and the evaluation of the foundational year indicates that as well. However, you do not deliver a change programme in one-year chunks. We need the ability to invest in a change programme over time, with a multiyear funding commitment, to give people the confidence to adapt their ways of working and work differently. Our number 1 ask is that we have a multiyear approach to the museum futures programme and the challenges facing the sector.

There are other asks in there about addressing those capital needs and so on, but I think that we need to look at this next round of funding in a strategic way. So far, museums and galleries have probably not had what we are calling a fair share of the £70 million that has been deployed so far, in terms of what has gone to the museum futures programme. However, there is an opportunity to do something to address those scary figures that I shared with you, because they are alarming, and I

think that we need to take them seriously, given the trajectory from the position that we were in two years ago.

09:45

The Convener: Understood. It is increasingly clear that rising budgets are just as controversial and contested over as falling budgets. They do not make everything easy.

Liam Sinclair, there is quite a lot for you to respond to there.

Liam Sinclair: It might be useful if I respond from an organisational delivery perspective.

To your point, convener, to meet that ambition, culture has to meet people where people are—that has to be our ambition, rather than expecting people to go to where we want to deliver culture. That is the mission of the National Theatre of Scotland, which was famously founded as a national theatre without walls.

To colour in the picture a bit, I can say that, in the previous financial year, we delivered 23 productions and events, seven of which were world premieres, and they met a live audience of in excess of 118,000, with a cinema audience of a further 103,000 seeing our production of "The Fifth Step" through our partnership with National Theatre Live.

Within that, though, there was a series of ticketed events in traditional theatre and event spaces, as you might expect, but there was also a range of events in other spaces. Our partnership with Imaginate, which is called theatre in schools Scotland, takes live performance right into the heart of schools, and that delivered 92 performances that year, reaching 5,000 young people. We put on Trolleydarity, which was an in-hospital performance to take theatre to people who cannot access culture, mostly long-term hospital patients, in this case. There were 38 performance events for that show, reaching 1,100 people in one-to-one performances at their hospital bedsides. More recently, we have had "One Hundred Voices", which was a three-year partnership to honour the stories of Scotland's care-experienced communities. It began with an installation in the Scottish Parliament as part of the Edinburgh festival fringe, which won a fringe first award. It has been touring Scotland, visiting Dumfries and Galloway most recently, and has been bringing in audiences who have care experience or are interested in the subject matter. We have noticed, from feedback, that people are attending who might not attend traditional-type cultural events, because the policy action that we are interested in exploring through theatre has reached their lives, causing them to feel interested.

I bring us back to resourcing again, because all of that needs resourcing. The National Theatre of Scotland's ambition for our activity is projected to generate a deficit next year of £423,000, based on standstill funding. I previously used the analogy of an elastic band. The culture sector is incredible in the way that it can stretch out resource and make things work but, like an elastic band, it will reach a breaking point, and certainly from our perspective as a national performing company, we are approaching that point now. In fact, we are already in that point where the strain on that elastic band is showing.

The Convener: Thank you all very much. I will throw the discussion open to members.

Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform): I saw a performance of "One Hundred Voices", and I thought that it was excellent. I grew up with a family member in care, so I really thought that it was touching. It did a great job. People who were there all said the same thing—that it hit the mark. It helped a lot of people understand what it was like to be in care.

I am interested in what return you got in cash terms—I am thinking of the theatre production being on the big screens and so on. What kind of turnover did that get for you at the end of the year?

Liam Sinclair: First, I am really pleased that you managed to see "One Hundred Voices". Thanks for the feedback. I will pass that on to the team; they will be delighted to hear that.

Often, when we work in a commercial setting, we work with a third-party commercial producer. "The Fifth Step" was originated as a production at the Edinburgh international festival in 2024. It then went on to have a west end run that was produced by two London-based commercial producers. We had a licensing arrangement, and that returned something near £100,000, which we could use to fund more productions. National Theatre Live picked up that production, too, through another licensing arrangement. It is like all commercial endeavours: the more you would like to make, the more you have to be prepared to risk. That is the case in commercial production across a range of realms.

One of the things that we are exploring as part of our new strategic outlook is how we can take a greater stake in further exploitation of work, so that we can, ultimately, leverage more from the Government grant and deliver more investment and commercial return.

Senga Beresford: Last year, your main programme reached 12 out of 32 local authority areas. You talk about stretching the budget to reach as many areas as possible. Do you see that happening with your budget within the next year?

Liam Sinclair: It is a great question. One of our real challenges, which is shared by the five national performing companies, is the rising cost of touring. The cost has gone up exponentially since the pandemic, and United Kingdom-wide research is pointing to a crisis in maintaining touring infrastructure because of those rising costs. To illustrate that, earlier this year we toured the country with "The High Life: The Musical"—I should get in a plug that it has been nominated for the best UK musical at the UK Theatre awards in a few weeks' time. We were keen to get a new musical, created in Scotland, around all the major venues. The touring cost alone of being in Inverness for a week is about £100,000. People might want to see the work, and we would not expect them to come to the central belt, but the ambition of getting around local authorities and to different places comes at a real cost. It takes us back to the resourcing point on standstill funding.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North) (SNP): I direct members to my entry in the register of interests as vice-chair of the National Mining Museum Scotland.

I would like to focus on the funding of Museums Galleries Scotland. The majority of the additional funding that has been handed out to arts and culture over the past few years has gone to Creative Scotland's multiyear funding. In your letter to the committee, Lucy Casot, you suggested that museums are under significant pressure and that

"it is time that Scotland's museums and galleries received their fair share."

What is a fair share? What would you do with the money if you got it?

Lucy Casot: We are going to need to work differently, and the museum futures programme, which I have mentioned, is a different way of working. We can all see the direction of public finance. Change is necessary for the sector to adapt to the realities that we are in, but change also provides an opportunity to be not only more innovative but more collaborative. Those are the things that museum futures is really grounded in.

In a way, it is a form of public service reform from the ground up—of seeing where we can invest in ideas that have the potential for growth. We call them pathfinder ideas, where we are looking at, for example, shared storage. We cannot solve the storage issue. We know the scale of the Scottish Government grant to the art works project, which is enormously welcome, but issues around how we store and look after our collections are replicated across the country. Instead of trying to solve that 32 times over, we are looking at any opportunities for regional support and for creating shared facilities. For example, many museums in the Highlands operate with a single member of staff, so we have a project to create a shared post. We have a shared finance officer working across a number of museums, and a shared Gaelic development officer, who is employed by a number of museums. Those different ways of working show real promise. It is about strategic investment, rather than going museum to museum to look at what each one needs.

The Creative Scotland multiyear funding question is really important. There has been a really welcome uplift in the amount of money going into regularly funded organisations and in our ability to support arts organisations, but museums have no route to that. There is no equivalent for museums to apply for multiyear funding. It is not a question of uplifting from where they are at, because there is nothing there at the moment. We need to think really carefully about that. However, we are working with museums to make them as resilient as possible. What are their opportunities to generate new income from different sources and be more entrepreneurial, and what opportunities do they have?

Museums are all very different. We have innovation projects in a number of areas, both to raise income—for example working with the cruise industry—and reduce costs. For example, we have a project that is looking at new forms of energy generation in the Museum of Lead Mining, and heat exchange between the water in the old mine workings and the water in the burn.

Those are real innovation projects that can deal with both cost and income but, even after they have done those things, many museums will still have a structural funding gap. The museum futures programme tries to support organisations to reduce that strategic gap, but, for many, the reality is that the cost of caring for collections and delivering service is going up. Museums will be able to continue delivering what they deliver for communities—the programmes that we have talked about, and the work with health and wellbeing groups and education groups, for instance—only if they have funding, because the baseline costs for the museum of caring for the collections and the buildings and of being open to the public have to be met.

The discretionary things tend to be the programming and developing the collections care behind the scenes. Those things are being stripped and hollowed out of the service and can be delivered only with funding. When museums are flourishing, they are able to respond to many wider societal issues, such as loneliness, isolation, health and wellbeing and the need for warm or cool spaces, but they can do that only if the doors are open. For many people, a visit to a museum might be their first access to culture and then they can

access all the things beyond that but, if the doors are shut, so much is at risk of being lost.

I hope that that answers your question, Colin.

Colin Beattie: You have covered a lot of interesting ground in that answer, but I come back to the question: what is a fair amount? What would you need to achieve your ambition? That is not an offer, by the way.

Lucy Casot: Museum futures is a programme that was designed to grow. When we first proposed it, we said that, because it is trying new things and we need to learn from them, we would want £4 million, £5 million or £6 million and then to grow from that. We want to prove that an idea works and, once the pathfinder ideas have been identified, we need to be able to invest in the good ideas. That is where we come to the shared learning and the peer support. It is a model of growth from where we are, which is a £4 million fund. The multiyear commitment is crucial.

There are some organisations that we need to think about that are at risk right now. We cannot save every museum. It is not realistic to think that we can address all of the issues that are happening; we have to think strategically about what sort of sector we want to have and invest in those things. There may be some shared models that we could use. Six local authority museums have closed this year and a number of local authorities are looking at consolidating services. However, if a museum closes, the collection still needs to be cared for, as does the building. There are still baseline costs that are not saved. The museum futures programme is much more about strategic investment.

I am sorry that I do not have a figure for you, Colin. Double the funding for starters. The need is clearly there. We can easily come back to you. We are looking at a figure but I do not want to pluck one out of the air.

Colin Beattie: That would be—[*Interruption*.]

Lucy Casot: Well, the sector might come back to me and say to me that I shot too low by saying, "Double it," but we will see what happens over the parliamentary session with that museum futures investment.

There is an urgent need for capital funding, because £1.6 million of capital across the needs that we have in the sector, which are very substantial, does not touch the sides. For a number of years, we have been drawing comparisons with the investment that happens through the museum estate and development—MEND—fund in England. We are not looking at whole redevelopments of venues, which is a big capital project that the lottery might fund, but are looking to address the basic needs, some of which are climate related, such as gutters and windows and investing to keep the buildings safe for the public and for collections. We need significant investment in the estate that we have. I think that £160 million has been invested through the cultural programme in England this year, so we are keen to explore comparisons with that and see whether there are consequentials from that level of investment that we could consider for the museum sector in Scotland.

Colin Beattie: You have been positive about the museum futures programme. I think that it is about £4 million at the moment.

Lucy Casot: It is.

Colin Beattie: There are various other strands underneath the programme. Does the allocation of the subsidiary funds meet current needs?

10:00

Lucy Casot: This is a new programme, so we are very much evolving it in response to needs. Our real desire through museum futures is to get to the innovation strand and those big pathfinder structural change projects.

We are finding that the sector is in a worse state than we had anticipated when we first had the idea for museum futures. Organisations need the capacity to change, so they need to invest. One of the elements that we have put funding into is the leadership capacity fund, which is buying out time for leaders. The reduction in the number of posts in a lot of museums means that they are losing a middle tier of resource, so a director might also be manning the front desk, ordering for the cafe and making sure that there is toilet paper. If you are having to run and do all the operational duties, then you are not able to take advantage of a local opportunity, a place-based opportunity or a collaboration, because those things take time to develop.

We need to invest in leadership capacity and in what we are calling unlocking potential grants. The programme starts with an organisational health check, which looks holistically at, for example, what the challenges are in relation to governance and leadership, what the organisation is investing in marketing and what things are holding it back. We can put in microgrants of up to £3,000 to solve little things, because organisations do not have the ability to do so when they are really stretched. Unlocking potential is looking at things such as an organisation's information technology system being so out of date that it is not possible for it to fundraise, because it does not know who is buying tickets and its systems do not talk to each other and so on. It is about dealing with those things that you cannot fund through traditional project funding routes because it is much harder to match them to

the national outcomes; however, they are foundational things that will enable investment in other things if you can get them right. That is why museum futures has multiple strands: microgrants, leadership capacity, unlocking potential, innovation and pathfinders.

Beyond the grants, there is a wraparound programme of support: we work with VisitScotland on training and capacity building, with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations on governance issues, with Culture & Business Scotland on fundraising and so on. All those different elements come together to look holistically at what each organisation needs, so they have a relationship with somebody who works alongside them in Museums Galleries Scotland. It is a relational funding model that is used not for one big project but for what an organisation needs next, and the programme considers the next step that an organisation needs to take to make itself more resilient.

The programme is one year in, so it is in its infancy, but we will share the evaluation with the committee because it has really been quite powerful and we are learning a lot as we go. A key learning has been getting that foundational level right, because the capacity to change needs investment in itself.

Colin Beattie: The money is obviously important, but it is the outcomes from the deployment of that money that are really important. You touched earlier on the participation of communities. How successful have you been in engaging the wider community in what you are doing?

Lucy Casot: We support museums through other funding programmes as well. Museum futures is very much targeted at resilience, but what resilience looks like is different for every organisation. For example, the museum in Ness in the Outer Hebrides is very much a community hub: elderly people get picked up from their homes and brought to the museum for the day to go to the café; the museum has a community centre element. Through museum futures, we have just invested in an upgrade to the cafe and shop—the latter in particular because the local shop and post office closed down. The museum has taken on some of that work so people are able to buy a birthday card there; its shop now offers a wider range of things—not food, but other things—that people want to be able to get locally. The museum is responding to the need of that local community and is becoming a community hub for a lot more than just the collection.

That response is particularly—but probably not exclusively—true of a lot of our rural museums. Museums are very clear about their dual purpose of caring for collections and being there for communities so that they can access, learn from and be inspired by what museums do.

Our other funding also works directly with communities so that they are able to co-produce things. It is about bringing communities in and supporting them to make their own interpretations of collections. Communities are reached in a wide range of ways, but if the doors are not open, none of those programmes can happen.

The programme is targeted at the immediate need, which I talked about, and it is about that diagnostic bit for us to be able to see that one thing is a means to the other.

Colin Beattie: The outcomes are important—

The Convener: We have a few other themes to touch on. Could we make this the last question on the theme, please?

Colin Beattie: It is very important to be able to analyse the outcomes. What is your evaluation process for assessing the success of the project?

Lucy Casot: For the museum futures programme, we have evaluators—Social Value Lab—working alongside us. We have published the evaluation and we will happily share it with you. Although we have only been going for a year, we have already published three evaluation reports, because the learning that we are sharing is an absolutely critical part of this work. We have that external evaluation running alongside our work. Each project will evaluate its outcomes individually, and the programme as a whole and its approach is being evaluated, because we need to adapt as we go. This is a unique opportunity and it is a collaborative opportunity as well. We also get evaluation support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which has huge experience in this area of resilience funding, and support from the Scottish Government, to make sure that we are teasing out all of the different aspects of that.

It is very much a learning programme. We are bringing together lunch and learn sessions, where people come and talk about their project ideas and get peer response. It is totally built into the ethos of the programme that the learning can be shared, and we also want to share that beyond just museums, because there are things in the model that other people might find it interesting to explore. I am very happy to share that information with you, Colin—or to meet you separately, if it is useful to do so, in order to dig into it in more detail.

The Convener: Thanks very much. We will come to David Green now; I encourage members to pick on witnesses other than just Lucy Casot.

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): That is somewhat unfortunate,

because I was going to pick on you, Lucy. I will make this a relatively tight follow-up, if that is okay. You talked at great length about MEND from a UK Government perspective and you were talking about the trade-off with regard to capital expenditure. When it comes to capital expenditure and what that means in relation to revenue investment, do you have a list of assets that are, effectively, on red alert, so that if you do not shift funding right now, they will fall apart or be closed to the public? Are you at that sort of dangerous stage? What does the future look like?

Lucy Casot: There are some assets in that category. In order to really unpick that, we need to dig beyond the headlines of the survey results and get back to some of the museums that flagged those areas of concern. That is something that we will be doing over the coming months, because that survey is newly in, and some things were flagged in it. None of the museums that are at risk of closure are ones that we do not already know about, so we are working with them. However, it is the first time that we have asked the capital question in that way, so we will now go back to all the assets that said that they have urgent repair needs of a specific amount, in order to unpick that detail and be able to come back to you in future on it.

David Green: Excellent, thank you. It would be very helpful for the committee to have that detail, particularly when we are thinking about the next financial year.

I will take a step back and follow up on some of the convener's earlier questions about the strategy and how we measure it. I thank colleagues for the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing; it is pretty unclear about some of this aspect and, having listened to the answers, I do not think that I have any greater clarity—if the witnesses do not mind my saying so—on exactly how we measure impact in the cultural sector.

I will try again and I will illustrate some points that Lucy Casot has provided in evidence. Let us look in particular at wellbeing. Lucy, you highlighted to us that

"63% of museums are actively delivering targeted health and wellbeing activity",

and that

"68% work with people experiencing loneliness and isolation".

I am thinking particularly about the current Government's ambitions in relation to preventative spend, and looking at culture's impact and how it can prevent spending in other public services. It is that key thing around isolation and wellbeing, which is really important to unpack, measure and illustrate. I think that that is what the Government is looking to hear. I will start with Joseph Peach and work back around the room. Can you help us out with that a little bit?

Joseph Peach: Absolutely. There are a couple of things. There is understanding, at the point of making decisions around spending, of what is already happening. Every year, when we have these conversations about spending and budgets, the sector produces a huge range of statistics and figures about all the different impacts that we are having, whether that is on health and wellbeing and reducing isolation, or on the economy. All of these metrics across society are there. However, we do not have any way of saying that, on the whole, the Scottish Government is spending X amount this year and might spend X amount more, and what that means for what the whole culture sector—as an ecosystem—is actually delivering against those outcomes.

That is really detailed policy stuff, I guess, but there is a gap, and we need to move towards talking in more specific terms. That is what the process of strategy development that we have mentioned in a few different ways this morning is about. How can we be more specific about the chain that links inputs to outcomes? How can we get a clearer sense that, if we spend a certain amount in one place, it will give us a greater or different impact somewhere else?

Another key aspect is how we pull the different parts of the public sector together in order to achieve aims. We can prove that culture delivers many different impacts on health and wellbeing, but part of the barrier to achieving greater impacts is about how health services link up with cultural interventions. I cannot remember the statistics on this off the top of my head, unfortunately, but I will happily come back to you with them. We need to think about the number of general practitioner hours that are spent over the course of a week on non-urgent things that arise from isolation and other wellbeing-type factors that could be addressed in the community in different ways, including through cultural interventions. At the moment, we lack a policy framework to allow those things to be joined up. We could divert people from that contact with primary care into community-based interventions, which could be cultural ones.

That example concerns health and wellbeing, but there is a lot of detail of that type across different policy areas. We talk in quite general terms about needing better cross-policy working, but the detailed linkages do not exist between the culture sector and other parts of the public sector.

I hope that that answer is useful and a bit more specific, but it is a big topic.

David Green: You talked at length in your manifesto and earlier today about the proposed

culture bill and the co-design opportunities. Is it your expectation that some of those questions can be answered in that process? If so, do you share my concern that, when I put it to ministers last week that that bill should be print ready by the end of the current session of Parliament, they were somewhat lukewarm about the idea?

Joseph Peach: Absolutely. One of the challenges that I see is that we are not just talking about what more the culture sector wants or needs to do, because there is nothing but willingness right across the sector to do more and deliver more. Liam Sinclair spoke about the elastic band and the ability to stretch resources, and alongside that there is an absolute desire to contribute to the wider challenges that Scotland faces and the wider direction that Scotland wants to go in to create a more positive future. What has been a barrier to cross-policy working is that, to really embed that, we need to talk not only about what the culture sector needs to do, but about what other parts of the public sector need to do. That is the tricky bit, and we need to get into that.

David Green: Thank you. If I have time, I will come back to that wider context. Do Liam and Lucy have reflections that they want to share?

Liam Sinclair: Your question goes to the heart of the future contribution of culture. The national performing companies take the demonstrating of impact really seriously. Earlier this year, we presented an economic impact report to the Finance and Public Administration Committee. Patrick Harvie was there. That report does two things. First, it looks at direct impact through gross value added. From the £24.6 million national performing company budget, £60.6 million of GVA was added to the Scottish economy, supporting 1,280 Scottish jobs.

Secondly, we worked with our consultants to identify the economic value that arises from all the wellbeing activities. We used an HM Treasury-recommended measure of wellbeing impact called wellbeing-adjusted life years, or WELLBYs. That measure was new to me in the past year. It looks at all the preventative possibilities that arise from creative engagement in schools, hospital contexts, et cetera. In the same period, that generated a further £40.5 million of wellbeing impact. Therefore, the Scottish Government's £24.6 million budget for the national performing companies added £100 million of economic benefit to the Scottish economy in GVA and wellbeing.

We have engaged Biggar Economics to do a further deep dive into that, which will involve looking at more recent data across a range of different scenarios. In addition, several years ago, the national performing companies did a social impact report that looked at a range of contributions that they make. I do not have that to hand, but I can supply it to the committee—I will follow up on that with the clerk.

10:15

I echo what Joseph Peach said—we need to have some agreed metrics across the sector. There has been a welcome conversation about the cross-portfolio contribution of culture for quite some time, but, over the life cycle of this session of Parliament, we need to embed that in policy areas, across the Cabinet and, indeed, across committees, so that culture professionals such as those of us who are here today attend meetings not only of the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, but of all the committees, to make that case and demonstrate how culture is contributing to taking Scotland forward.

Lucy Casot: I echo that. The chief medical officer's recognition of the wellbeing impact of arts and culture is welcome and absolutely right. There has been a lot of research on the issue. I totally appreciate the call for evidence to be provided of that impact. We have a report on the health and wellbeing impact that we can share with the committee, as well as research on the educational impact and the economic impact.

The health and wellbeing research tells us that museums have a positive impact on mental wellbeing. As well as helping to reduce stress and anxiety, they lower people's chances of developing depression and lead to reduced isolation and a greater sense of identity. Participation in museum activity reduces chronic pain and lowers people's chances of developing dementia in later life. In addition, visiting museums and galleries is associated with increased longevity, as well as having positive outcomes for people with dementia and their carers. All of that is evidenced, and we are happy to share that evidence with the committee.

You were right to ask the question. It is essential that those impacts are not recognised only by the culture sector, as colleagues have said.

David Green: Thank you for those answers, which I appreciate.

With my final question, I want to kick off a conversation about public sector reform. I recognise that spend on culture is not confined to the culture budget. You have welcomed the uplift in funding from the Scottish Government, but the picture in the wider ecosystem—in local government, in particular—has become increasingly uncertain. Local government budgets have been cut significantly. The Parliament will debate the issue this afternoon; we will also scrutinise the Scottish Government's plans for serious reform of local government.

At this stage, it is uncertain what funding settlements will look like. There are reasons for that. We have not yet had the UK or Scottish budgets. Nonetheless, the picture is pretty uncertain. In looking at the culture sector's engagement with the budget, we must recognise the uncertainty that exists across local government in relation to public sector reform. Can you speak about your expectations, your hopes and your fears? Can you tell us what you think that the committee should be scrutinising?

Liam Sinclair: I am happy to have the first stab at that. It is clear from some of the headline projections, such as the fact that the Parliament is facing a £5 billion funding gap in relation to its policy commitments, not to mention the public service reform agenda, that, collectively, across all our delivery in Scotland, we need to look at doing things differently. The culture sector is full of people who imagine new possibilities every day of their working lives, and I think that the practice of new thinking in the creation of work, which involves techniques such as design sprints, can be applied to policy objectives. I do not mean that glibly; I am not grandstanding. I genuinely think that there is expertise in the culture sector that can support some of the transformation that will have to happen during the life cycle of this session of Parliament.

The Convener: Lucy Casot and Joseph Peach both want to come in. I will bring Lucy in first.

Lucy Casot: We made a submission to the Public Service Reform Committee in which we set out our view that the reform agenda must be about improving how public services work together, rather than simply being about reducing expenditure. I have already spoken about the museum futures programme. We think that that is an example of how we can test some of the ways in which that could work.

Museums are already on the ground in various ways, collaborating with schools, with health and social care, with local authorities and with communities. The museum futures programme is trying to test that practical model of building organisational capacity and testing those new approaches. The public service reform agenda must be very much about improving outcomes for people and should not be based on just reducing costs.

There is an opportunity for cultural spaces, including museums, to play a greater role in what we do in that regard. They are civic spaces that have volunteers with expertise, and they are also available during the day and might have education spaces that could be used in different ways by communities. It might be that not every community can have a community hall, a museum, a library and so on, so we might need to look at what needs to be done in the way of sharing spaces. The sharing of learning through the museum futures programme is intended to inform what that could look like in practice, and we very much look forward to working with others on that.

Joseph Peach: I will make a few points on public service reform. It was brilliant to get confirmation in the evidence that the cabinet secretary gave to the committee a couple of weeks ago that the need to reduce that kind of deficit is not going to impact on the Scottish Government's culture spend, but I have huge worry about what the proposals are going to do to local authority culture spending, given the real-terms reduction in what local authorities have been spending over the past 10 to 12 years. Since 2013, their spending in the area is down 21.5 per cent—over a fifth—in real terms.

Obviously, local authorities have been operating in a hugely constrained context over that period, which has led us to this point where looking at quite significant reforms is very much on the table. It is important to note that there is no requirement to deliver cultural services in a local authority context. There is very loose wording about a requirement to provide an "adequate" public library service and an "adequate" culture and heritage offer, but it is impossible to apply a standard to that, and there is huge variance in what is going on in various local authority areas across Scotland.

In a context in which further massive savings are going to need to be made and there is consolidation and devolution of various aspects of what local authorities are doing, if there is not a really clear approach to where cultural services are going to be within all of that, the risk of that spend eroding further is really high. That is an important point to pay attention to over the next wee while, as this public service reform agenda continues.

The Convener: Keith Brown has a question, and two more members would like to come in after that. I am conscious of the time, so I ask people to keep things reasonably tight.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I have two questions: the first is for Lucy Casot and Liam Sinclair, and the second one is for Joseph Peach. First, though, I would just observe that, to be honest, it is amazing how quickly the one area of Government expenditure that we can identify as having a substantial uplift has generated a counsel of despair. However, I understand the points that have been made by Lucy Casot and Joseph Peach in relation to the long tail of constrained budgets that has led to underlying issues that will not be solved by one uplift.

Given the fact that the UK is £3 trillion in debt and has to deal with all the issues that we know of from the 17 years of austerity budgets, it seems unlikely that there is going to be a very substantial uplift from any Government to deal with some of the outstanding issues, in which case we have to look at other approaches.

I appreciate the extent to which this issue has been mentioned, but in relation to museums, in particular, although it might also be true of the wider sector, what can be done to better exploit—I am happy to use that word, although some people are not—for commercial benefit the vast treasure trove of things that museums in Scotland have? Has any analysis been done of the financial benefits that accrued from initiatives such as the Wallace sword going across to New York? I have bored the committee with that example before, but it brought important benefits for the Wallace monument in terms of its upkeep and running cost for a number of years afterwards. Another example is the world's oldest football going across to the world cup this year, although that was a pretty damp squib, with not much being made of it at all.

Given some of the artefacts that we have in Scotland and the ability to exhibit things that are very appealing to discrete sectors overseas—I am thinking of things related to clan histories and so on—are you happy that there is enough systematic examination of such opportunities and of what such opportunities might realise in cash terms, which could help pay for the things that Lucy Casot talked about, such as keeping the doors of facilities open and ensuring that the facilities are serviced? To what extent is that currently happening, and is there the potential to do more of it?

Lucy Casot: I think that we are seeing change. The straitened times force that creative thinking.

I can give you a couple of statistics from the survey. Admissions income, as a percentage of the non-grant income that is coming in, has gone up from 6.1 per cent to 13.2 per cent, and a lot of that income comes from bespoke experiences. Unlike in England, local authority museums in Scotland are not allowed to charge for entry, but they can charge for experiences on top. For example, Live Borders has created paid experiences at Jedburgh castle such as a new escape room and a dark history tour. I should also say that shop and retail income has gone up as a percentage of income, from 5.4 per cent to 10 per cent. On both of those metrics, earned income from other sources has doubled.

As part of the museum futures programme, we are doing a lot of philanthropy work and looking at different forms of, and ideas for, fundraising. I am thinking of, for example, the Robert Burns flute that went out from Ellisland farm to tartan week. Museums are getting creative in that respect—these are, after all, creative people, and it is a creative sector. There are lots of ideas, but it takes a lot of investment—and investment in skills, too—to realise them, and that is what we are trying to support at the moment. I would say that things are very much going in the right direction, and we want to be able to support what is happening.

I should also mention peer learning and learning from others about any ideas that have been really successful. We are also ensuring that we make the most of clan connections and such like.

Keith Brown: Going back to my point about the Wallace sword, I note that it was part of a substantial genealogical exhibition at Grand Central terminal for international audiences, and the National Youth Choir of Scotland was over there, too. That shows how central Government can help to raise the profile of, and increase access to, local things.

In Clackmannanshire, Creative Scotland spends not a penny—nothing. I think that we heard David Green tell the chamber last week that North Lanarkshire gets 39p per head, and I know that Edinburgh gets £30-odd per head. Meanwhile, Clackmannanshire gets nothing at all. That said, I note the mention that was made of the touring workshops. Robert Burns was brought to my kids' school in Clackmannanshire, and the show was really enjoyed by everyone who saw it. Is there more that Creative Scotland could do, perhaps working with the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and others, to be quite hard-headed about raising funding and enabling all of you to do other things?

Liam Sinclair: I would not necessarily speak for Creative Scotland, but I can definitely pick up on the themes that you have raised. You have talked about the long tail; I want to talk about funding for a minute, and I will then say what could be achieved that would have greater impact and how we might bring in other sources.

The national performing companies have pointed to the long tail of the increased culture spend as it moves towards the £100 million total—there is also the additional £50 million that has been pledged—and they have made it clear that that money has not yet reached all parts of the culture infrastructure. The fundamental issue is that, if we want a collection of national performing companies in Scotland—and it seems that we do, given that we are now working towards the establishment of a sixth—they need to be resourced properly to deliver value and meet expectations. Our challenge is to be seen in parity with the funding settlements flowing through Creative Scotland, which saw a change of 33 per cent in year 1 for regularly funded organisations

and a 54 per cent change in existing funding in year 2.

Alongside that, the national companies—certainly the National Theatre of Scotland—are focused on leveraging as many sources of income as possible. I have touched on commercial exploitation—that is a word that we are happy to use. We make extraordinary theatre in this country, and, if it has a market value elsewhere in the UK or internationally, we should be seeking to exploit those opportunities not only to bring financial investment back into the sector and to the organisations in Scotland, but to extend the nation's reach and the brand profile.

We work really hard at that. In our last year of the £4.5 million from the Scottish Government, we raised another £2 million on top, and we are challenging ourselves to raise more all the time. To echo my comments about public service reform, I would say that we will need new and imaginative ways of working, but all of this work is predicated on having a solid grant base and solid foundations on which to build.

We welcome the challenge, and the national companies are focused on increasing sources of funding, but, in order to do that work, we need a solid grant foundation. As a result, we are asking the Government to consider giving us parity with regard to the investments that it made in Creative Scotland-funded organisations.

10:30

Keith Brown: We have already heard that appeal in the chamber during this parliamentary session.

I have a quick question for Joseph Peach. The Scottish Parliament is often accused of legislating for its own sake. What changes in law, through a culture bill, would be beneficial?

Joseph Peach: If you want to get into the details, I can think of a few things that would be beneficial. I am just trying to think of how to put this in the best way. It goes back to the example that I gave earlier about local authorities. There is no specific requirement to deliver culture in those settings. There is no standard that sets out what local authorities need to be doing.

More widely, we need to think about how we enable more holistic cross-departmental and cross-policy connectivity that would lead to the best return on culture investment. A fair amount of that needs to be predicated on legislation that creates duties and obligations. Strategies can set out intentions, but, at some point, we have to consider requirements.

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): Liam Sinclair, you mentioned that you were at a meeting of the Finance and Public Administration Committee in January, in advance of the budget being published that day. I was reviewing the *Official Report* of the meeting, and there seemed to be a hope from you and the other representatives of the performing companies that it might be your turn, following the funding uplifts that Creative Scotland received, as has been discussed at length, but an uplift did not materialise in the 2026-27 budget. In your submission, you talk about the need for an uplift, and there has been a promise that there might be one in 2028-29. What has been the impact on the National Theatre of Scotland and, more broadly, on the national performing companies of not receiving the uplift that you needed in the 2026-27 budget?

Liam Sinclair: In the previous parliamentary session, the Government's positioning definitely suggested that there would be a tiered or staggered approach to meeting the £100 million target in relation to how the money would flow through the sector. There was an indication that a funding uplift for the national performing companies would be provided within the timeframe of the previous parliamentary session, but, as you have noted, that did not happen.

The immediate impact is that all the national performing companies are projecting a level of deficit budgeting for next year. I will not speak about the numbers for the other chief executives, but we project that we will have a deficit of £423,000, and that figure will rise exponentially. We approved a deficit budget of just under £100,000 for the current financial year. In relation to maintaining a national profile and reach, we directly employ 76 staff, with a full-time equivalent of 60, and we work with in excess of 600 freelancers every year to deliver our programme. We want to protect that workforce and deliver value for Scotland, but the realities of deficit budgeting are starting to bite.

We are encouraged by the comments that the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic has made, including when she was speaking with the committee a few weeks ago, about the national performing companies being in her mind as she considers the next steps towards spending the remaining £30 million. Our understanding is that that £30 million is forecast to be provided in the 2028-29 financial year, so that leaves another financial year to bridge, which will result in deficit budgeting. We need a long-term sustainable plan.

We are also encouraged by comments that suggest that the multiyear funding principle that has been flowing through organisations that are

funded by Creative Scotland could be extended and applied more broadly to organisations that the Scottish Government funds directly. If, in this year's budget, we could move towards a three-year projection for the national performing companies that clearly lays out how grant in aid will flow through those organisations over the three years, that would help to stabilise the situation and allow us to get back to our primary job, which is delivering for the people of Scotland and internationally in relation to the brand profile of Scotland.

Jenny Young: The point about the three-year projection is a really fair one. We have heard those warm words from the previous cabinet secretary as well as from the current one, but until you actually see the numbers in the budget spreadsheet—you can speak to the experience of the past five years—there will be some doubt as to when that will actually come about. As you said, the Scottish Government has said that the big uplift should be coming in 2028-29, but it has been suggested that it needs to be in the budget for 2027-28. Can you be more specific about why you really need that money now?

Liam Sinclair: It goes back to the deficit budgeting challenge. All the national companies want to maintain their reach, maintain their workforce and keep delivering value. That is creating a deficit position, and, as members know, deficit budgeting is not just a balance sheet issue, because running a negative cash projection creates real-world cash-flow challenges for any organisation.

There is a perception—and it is true—that the national performing companies are well resourced in broader culture sector terms. A line that I have regularly used with colleagues in the theatre sector is that the National Theatre of Scotland has the largest grant awarded for theatre production in Scotland but that it is currently the most deflated grant, which is creating a real gap between the actual financial resource available and the expectation of the broader sector and the public in relation to what they want from their National Theatre of Scotland. The longer we have that gap, the more the recovery phase will have to do to change the situation. Therefore, the sooner the Scottish Government can put a change to the grant funding into the mix, the better.

Jenny Young: Yes, absolutely.

On the Scottish Government's commitment to create a new national performing company for traditional music, we already have five national performing companies and we have rehearsed the budgeting issues. Have you or the other national performing companies, as far as you are aware, had any communication from the Scottish Government about how the new national performing company will function or be funded? In your written submission, I picked up concern that the current pie will just be sliced in six rather than five.

Liam Sinclair: I think that I speak on behalf of the five existing NPCs in saying that we really welcome the suggestion of creating a sixth national performing company to give appropriate status to the traditional music sector in Scotland, which is another fantastic Scottish export. We have had engagement with the Scottish Government on it. The cabinet secretary convened a round-table meeting about four or five weeks ago, and we were able to send a representative in order to have robust engagement in the process. It is all positive, provided that it is additionality. Two things have to run in tandem: the structural funding gap for the existing five national performing companies must be addressed in addition to resourcing the establishment of, and then the ongoing revenue budget that is required for, the sixth national performing company.

Jenny Young: Lucy Casot, on Museums Galleries Scotland and the issue of capital funding, I was concerned to read some of the statistics in your written submission, which showed the percentage of buildings that are behind on maintenance, and of the issue of caring for a building the condition of which is graded as poor or bad. We can well imagine that situation in relation to some of the buildings that house our museums and galleries. What risks are posed by the lack of, or gap in, capital spending? That is quite a broad question.

Lucy Casot: To illustrate what that looks like, I note that a museum that we work with has a store in the basement, so nothing is stored on the ground and everything is raised up; however, when it rains heavily, which is happening increasingly, not only are there buckets all down the stairs and into the store, but you will see staff in rows using brushes to brush the water into the lift shaft.

We are talking about collections that are being cared for on behalf of Scotland's people. It is not an acceptable situation, but it is something that museums are grappling with every day, because the cost of keeping the doors open, being a museum and providing that service to communities must be balanced against the costs of addressing such issues. I am equally concerned about that position, and we must address it at the sector level. That is why we are considering options such as having regional hubs for storage, rather than trying to fix things museum by museum. However, it is clear that some situations are really serious.

In Scotland, we have a distributed national collection. In addition to the national collection that is held by national museums and galleries, there are 51 collections that are recognised as having national significance, and it is really important that we get more detail of the conditions in which that distributed national collection is being kept.

The money just is not there to invest at the moment. Our capital funding is capped at £100,000. We have a repair and adaptation fund, but there is only £1.6 million to allocate across 450 museums. Many organisations cannot apply for that, because fixing one roof will cost more than the available funding. We desperately need to increase the scale of that funding to meet some of these really urgent needs.

Jenny Young: Museums Galleries Scotland's written submission mentions the UK Government's museum estate and development fund and its announcement this year of additional money to support museum infrastructure. Have you had any discussions with the Scottish Government about establishing an equivalent fund, or even about whether Scottish funding could be topped up through the Barnett consequentials that will flow from that extra funding?

Lucy Casot: Each year, we raise that in our submission. Capital funding is a really tricky issue. Looking at the consequentials may be another way of addressing the issue following this latest round, because we need to identify where that funding might be going. There is a serious need for more money.

Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP): I will try to be brief. My questions are mainly for Culture Counts. First, I point members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a sitting councillor in West Lothian and a former employee of the National Youth Choir of Scotland.

Joseph Peach, we have talked about how welcome the funding increase for the sector as a whole is, particularly the multiyear aspect. However, your submission makes the point that the stabilising effects of that are perhaps not being felt by individual artists and freelancers, and that you recommend a grant-in-aid allocation for Creative Scotland's open funds.

Figures show that the number of self-employed people in the culture sector has dropped quite significantly—by 15 per cent over three years, I think. Where have those people gone? Who is feeling the greatest effect of that? Is it, for example, early-career artists or freelancers? Is the greatest effect in rural areas or in a particular art form? Where are we seeing the impact on individual artists and freelancers?

Joseph Peach: Keith Brown spoke about there being a counsel of despair despite the uplift. It might be one of those situations in which it is taking a while for the additional funding that has been committed to, which is welcome, to reach all parts of the sector. You are right in saying that that uplift is not being felt among individual artists and freelancers. The Scottish Government has committed to pilot a Scottish artists minimum income scheme, which is welcome, but what about the here and now? When Iain Munro gave evidence to the committee a couple of weeks ago, he spoke about Creative Scotland's open access funds. That is an existing pathway that enables artists and individual people with an idea, essentially, to make it real. That is a really positive thing.

One of our key recommendations this year is that that should be supported by a grant-in-aid commitment. At the moment, the open funds that Creative Scotland delivers are underpinned almost entirely by national lottery funding, and Creative Scotland can allocate some grant in aid in-year if headroom in its budgets allows it. Last year, the grant-in-aid allocation was 3.8 per cent of the total amount distributed through the open funds.

There is a real pressure there because of the trajectory of what has been happening with lottery money more widely. The picture is hugely challenging. Creative Scotland's lottery income is worth about a third less in real terms than it was 10 years ago, and that is absolutely reflected in the value and quantity of awards that have been made from the open funds over the past three years. A total of £74 million in applications to the open funds went unfunded. That is, in essence, the value of projects and bits of cultural production at an individual level that would otherwise have taken place or been made. It could be seen as an opportunity if more funding going into those funds immediately results in more activity, production and stuff.

10:45

Another point about the funds is that they really are an entry point—around half of the awards that they make each year go to first-time recipients. I know that a lot of folk, including me and a lot of my peers—before I was doing this work, I was a musician working in trad music—can point to an open fund grant as the point at which their career trajectory really started to change.

With regard to what that means for the workforce, it is incredibly hard to be a freelancer in the arts in Scotland at present. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport figures that we have quoted in our submission are estimates, so they do not give you an exact numerical figure, but they illustrate the direction of travel. Over the past three

years, the number of people employed in the culture sector and the creative industries has remained broadly stable, so you can see a bit of a stabilising effect from the funds that come through. However, there has been a reduction of about 15 per cent in the freelance workforce, which I think has been felt across the piece. I am speaking anecdotally more than anything else, but I know folk at all different stages of their careers who are saying, "This is really hard" and looking elsewhere.

There has always been a bit of an issue—it comes through in the recommendations of the culture and fair work task force, which focuses extensively on freelancers—with the requirement for another type of income to subsidise or enable working in cultural activity in some way, given the low rates of pay and that sort of thing. However, the impacts are being felt across the board. I would happily follow up with some more specific case studies on those areas where there is a loss of the freelance workforce, but I would say that it is happening across the piece.

None of these things—neither the open funds nor a minimum income for artists or other recommendations from the culture and fair work task force—can address that problem in isolation. Nevertheless, looking at the levers that are available this year to make the situation a bit better and start to turn around the trend of decline, the open funds are there and they work, so that seems like an obvious lever to pull. It would be great to see that grant-in-aid commitment being made at budget time.

Pauline Stafford: Thank you for that. You make a clear distinction between grants from the open funds and a minimum income in that they have different impacts, but you emphasise that both are needed.

I have a final quick follow-up question. Keith Brown made a point about where cultural spending happens. Appendix 1 to your submission contains a breakdown of awards to individual artists. My own area of West Lothian has 0.6 per cent of funding from the open funds, and Clackmannanshire has 0.2 per cent; I am not sure what that equates to in terms of people. Can you say a bit about what the barriers are in that regard? Is it a result of people not applying in the first place, or is there simply no capacity to navigate the current process? Is it too complicated?

Joseph Peach: It is a bit of both—the reasons are multifaceted. If we think about the pipeline and how people get into this sort of work in the first place, we see that, quite often, it comes from having opportunities at quite a young age. I will give a personal example, if that is okay. I am speaking to you remotely from Ullapool—I come from Achiltibuie, which is just a wee bitty further north. I got into music not just because it was a subject that I could study at school, but because of a host of wraparound opportunities for me, as a young person, to get into music in the community and through additional programmes that came into school and various other opportunities as I moved up.

Before you get to the stage at which, as adults working in the world, folk are in a position to do this sort of work and consider applying to the open fund to deliver projects, the starting point for that pipeline is much earlier—almost decades earlier, when they are in school. One option is to look at provision that goes right through. It goes back to the ecosystem point that I made earlier. That is where the pipeline of people who will do this work begins.

I will leave it there. There is loads more that I could say, but I am aware of the time.

Lucy Casot: We are seeing an increase—I do not have the figure to hand—in the use of freelancers in the museums sector. One element of that is that, in the past, museums might have had a specialist post and, although they still need that service, they can no longer afford the post. There is a complex thing going on with freelancers. Perhaps a museum used to have an in-house conservator but it now needs to employ freelance conservators. That increases the precariousness for those individuals, for whom, in the past, there would have been jobs. There are lots of things going on in that area.

The Convener: We have run on a few minutes longer than planned, but we are very grateful for your time and input to the committee's pre-budget scrutiny.

I suspend the meeting for a few minutes, to allow a changeover of witnesses.

10:51

Meeting suspended.

10:55

On resuming—

The Convener: We will continue our pre-budget scrutiny with our second panel of witnesses. I will just make it clear to members that, with a panel of four witnesses as opposed to three, we will try to keep the discussions as tight as possible.

I welcome to the committee Fiona Campbell, who is the convener of the Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland; Veronique A A Lapeyre, who is the director of the Scottish Contemporary Art Network; Kenny McGlashan, who is the chief executive of the Federation of Scottish Theatre; and, joining us online, Alasdair

Nicolson, who is the festival director of the St Magnus International Festival.

I will open with a general question, as I did with the first panel of witnesses. There are a range of documents and strategies out there from the Scottish Government and different organisations about what they are looking to achieve in culture, and there is cross-party support for the rising trajectory of budgets. How confident are you that there is a clear connection between the money that is going in and the results in participation and access to culture that we are collectively looking to achieve? Who would like to dive in first? I will start from left to right from my point of view.

Kenny McGlashan (Federation of Scottish Theatre): Thank you for the invitation to join you today to submit evidence. We want to build on what you have heard already. The feedback and evidence that has been given has been quite consistent. The direction of travel with the increased investment has been hugely appreciated, and it has brought a stability that was missing before to elements of the sector.

However, that has not necessarily found its way through the system. What Joseph Peach from Culture Counts said about the sector being an ecosystem is very true; there are many different elements to it. There are opportunities for it to connect across disciplines and different art forms, as well as into other directorates and other ways of working. It is at its most impactful when the machinery is well oiled, ticking over and starting to pull in other types of benefits. It takes a bit of time for that to go through, but all those benefits are appreciated.

The witnesses in the earlier evidence session touched on not risking the new stability through any confusion over budgets or allocations; making it as transparent as possible; and, moving beyond that, supporting clarity about what the outcomes are. Everyone is ready for that. I hear it across the board, and you heard it from the earlier witnesses.

We have about 200 members, from freelancers to producing organisations to venues to national companies such as the National Theatre of Scotland. When we speak to our members, what we hear is quite consistent: they want to work together, they want to work more efficiently and they want the investments that are made in different parts of the ecosystem to work better. That is where we are. However, what we need to get for that is clearer metrics, as well as clearer connections between the commitments that come in vision documents and where those turn into demonstrable decision-making changes to how things are funded and reported on.

As it was characterised in the previous evidence session, we are in the right place and have the right commitment. We need to prioritise turning that into frameworks that are a bit more robust in seeing it through to impact on the ground, and to be committed to that over years rather than through immediate changes.

11:00

Veronique A A Lapeyre (Scottish Contemporary Art Network): Is SCAN, or am I, confident that the various strategies that we have in Scotland match the resources and will contribute to our long-term ambitions? Yes and no. Over the past 18 months in the contemporary arts and visual arts sector, there has been a significant withdrawal of support across the country, both financial and material. That is creating extremely challenging circumstances. We have seen several venues close, such as the CCA, and several venues are at risk, including Trongate 103 in Glasgow and the Cooper gallery in Dundee. Arts courses have been cut, and communities face reductions in participatory arts practice. Individuals, artists, curators and educators face extremely difficult circumstances, which we document in our submission.

Ultimately, it is the Scottish public who lose. They are losing community learning opportunities, chances to get together and opportunities for improving their health and wellbeing. It is extremely difficult right now for the contemporary arts, but I am confident in our sector. I am confident in the way we work, which is very collegiate, collaborative and innovative.

We are working across all the metrics that the Government is interested in, which I just listed. We are doing extremely good work, as well as furthering and advancing contemporary art in Scotland as an art form.

I agree with all my colleagues who have spoken before me, and I also agree with Kenny McGlashan. We need joined-up, collaborative and collegiate working across all sectors. Everyone needs to be taken as a serious professional with significant expertise.

The contemporary arts have significant expertise in community working regionally, nationally and internationally. We are doing excellent work in relation to brand Scotland. The artists who are working here are putting on amazing exhibitions. That work is world renowned, but we need some energy, momentum and joined-up thinking.

There have been great responses from the Government in terms of the uplifts and the future agreements, but we need to respond to the current conditions, which I have laid out, which are extremely difficult. Perhaps we need a new way of working between the Government, academia,

local authorities, Creative Scotland and our colleagues who are here today. We should be more transparent and open, and we should get together more; then we would be able to further the aims and objectives that we have.

I was interested to hear in the earlier evidence session about what the outcomes of the culture sector are—what are they and what do they do? We have so much evidence and data, but we are not doing anything with it, and it is not getting to the right people who are making decisions. We need more cross-area forums in which to get together and discuss things, and to understand how we move forward. It is not only about what happens here; it is also about what is happening in universities, local authorities and other sectors, including health, which has been spoken about.

So, yes, I am confident, but I am also hesitant and worried—that is my summary.

The Convener: There is a lot that I would like to dive in on there, but I will give others a chance to speak first.

Fiona Campbell (Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland): I appreciate the opportunity to come here representing a volunteer organisation, and also as a volunteer convener of an organisation, because, obviously, that grass-roots voice does not always get into the Parliament.

We support many of the things that people have mentioned, and we appreciate that there will be more money coming into the sector. I have been around a wee while—some of you may recognise me from Voluntary Arts Scotland and other organisations that I have been involved with. I was also with Culture Counts for quite a while. I feel that there are 60 years of experience in the TMSA as well.

We have been around a bit, and we have seen things come and go, but there seems to be a constant requirement to look at how we are doing things. It is good that money may come in, but we want it to stay and potentially grow.

Way back, the cultural commission—if members can remember that—produced a big tome, and there was an ask that we aim for, as a minimum, 1 per cent of the Government's budget to be spent on culture. That has become a consistent ask of the culture sector, even though that is well below the level of funding that is provided by a lot of our peer countries across the continent and beyond.

What happened to the national performance framework? I thought that it was great, because it provided a business plan for the country. I was quite involved in the work on the culture indicators.

Do we want to continually reinvent the wheel, or should we go back and look at things that have been created? I remember coming over here to study cultural policy and management, so I know all about the charter for the arts and all the other documents and frameworks that have been created. Are we good at enacting what gets created? I always have hope and say, "Yay, a strategy—this is going to work." However, we need to ensure that we stick to the strategies, and constant change does not help. It is good to have change, but constant change and working out the next buzzword and so on can be a problem.

Another issue is how money comes into the sector. We welcome more money going into multiyear funding applications. Unfortunately, that came in at stage 2, and some people who were at stage 1 did not get through that part of the process. Would more people have got through stage 1 and then stage 2 if that money had come in earlier? For example, the TMSA did not successfully get through stage 1. For the past 15 years, we have been trying to get regular funding again, mainly to support one of our big core projects, which is the TMSA young trad tour. That involves taking finalists for the BBC Radio Scotland young traditional musician of the year award on tours, including back to their home towns, to inspire the next generation, show what people can do and set out the evolution of the traditional arts.

People still do not quite understand that Covid still has resonance, not just in relation to people's health but in relation to the activity of organisations. A lot of organisations lost reserves that they have not yet been able to replenish. Some organisations have disappeared, but, half the time, we do not even know that they have disappeared, because they were not part of the regular funding landscape. Other organisations are still struggling to come back together.

The good news is that we have experienced a resurgence in attendance at our live events since they restarted. There has been a good bounce. People suddenly thought, "Hang on—we nearly lost something there. We have to go back and provide support and be with other people." Traditional folk music is from the people, of the people and for the people. People are gathering at the grass-roots level to re-energise, reconnect and create socialisation again.

There are good things. For example, it is good that the sector is being given more money. However, as Kenny McGlashan said, we need to think about how the money trickles down and filters out to all the different parts of the country. The TMSA runs an event in West Lothian without public subsidy. Such events might not always be on everyone's radar.

That is my point of view. Let us not forget the past, but let us go to the future based on our roots. That is where a lot of the strength of traditional music comes from—you know where your roots are, and you then follow out to the shoots.

The Convener: Alasdair Nicolson, do you want to add your thoughts on my opening question?

Alasdair Nicolson (St Magnus International Festival): Hello, everybody. Thanks for inviting me along.

In relation to policy and funding, how everything matches up and where we are, the influx of new funding is welcome. As a festival, we, of course, welcome the expanded festivals fund, which recently came on stream.

The problem that is felt by our organisation and perhaps more broadly is that, for small organisations with small teams, it can sometimes be difficult to manage the interaction between funding and strategy. Quite a lot of activity is required on policy and, for a small group of people working as an administrative team, it is difficult to live up to that and to deliver, and it sometimes distracts from other things. It is important to remember that strategies are only as good as the length of time that you have to do anything, plus you have to consider what is happening in the world around you.

Unfortunately, we are all probably working slightly behind the curve. We look forward, but we are always working behind. That is a difficult place to be when you are working with limited turnaround of funding and limited amounts of funding within the year. The policy behind the ideas of how well we work and how we work in Scotland is great, and we have a very robust arts community and output. However, I sometimes feel that policy drives more activity than is perhaps necessary, allied to its funding.

I come to the committee representing the rural and the island, and we always have to shout about that community in relation to policy and strategy, because what we often encounter is that policy and strategy are designed and thought about in the context of the urban. Scotland is a hugely rural and island community, and we sometimes encounter policy, structures and reports in a context that does not always make sense to us and does not feel as though it has had input from that particular world. There are huge differences in the ways that one works in a city environment and in an island environment, and that is sometimes the downfall of strategy. It does not always acknowledge those differences, despite the fact that they are hugely significant.

The Convener: I will start with some of the members who were a bit tight for time with the previous panel of witnesses. Jenny Young is first.

Jenny Young: Thank you. On how organisations interact with their local authority, many of the cultural venues that your organisations or your members use for performances and rehearsal space are owned or operated by local authorities. We touched on that issue in the earlier evidence session. The state of local authority funding presents a challenge, with huge reductions having been made over many years. My colleague David Green reflected on the fact that it is often in the breach that we have a spotlight on those venues. Veronique Lapeyre, you have talked about the various cultural venues that are at risk of closure, although they are not all local authority run, so Veronique—or Kenny McGlashan or Fiona Campbell—could you share your views on the current situation? How does the interaction with local authority funding impact or threaten the work that you do?

Fiona Campbell: Local authorities are a key part of any grass-roots and voluntary organisation networks. We must also be aware that a lot of changes are happening in, for example, the Church of Scotland infrastructure, with churches melding. This is not just an urban thing—some amazingly huge rural parishes are being created—so we have to think about that context and the use of educational institutions. Mention was made of the need to think about creating hubs, although, in rural areas, a hub could be in a small place that was hard to get to. However, the local authority network is still very key, and we need to think about whether every small community should have at least one convening space where people can go to socialise and meet. The irony is that that is actually a problem in some urban areas, too, although you might not believe it. Places have been closed in Edinburgh, for example, and communities of people in some areas are losing that facility, so the venue issue is a very grave one.

Another issue is what opportunity there is for community buyout. The scheme for doing that exists, but it only recently became more about things rather than places—islands, for example—so that aspect definitely needs to be looked at. I go back to the idea of a culture bill and having a baseline requirement that local authorities have to meet, because they work to statutory requirements in many cases, so, if the statutory requirement ain't there, they are not going to work towards it.

Jenny Young: That comes back to the funding issue. Local authorities are largely forced to work to statutory requirements, because that is all that they can really afford. Does anyone else want to come in on the broader issue?

11:15

Kenny McGlashan: I back the point that Joseph Peach made earlier about the local authority picture not being clear. There is a lack of clarity on the role that local government plays and the impacts, challenges or opportunities in that wider ecosystem. That even applies to our membership. We have recently done a focused piece of work on audience data that our venue members can share so that they can establish a baseline to see how things have evolved, what the challenges are and so on. I can come back to that later, if that would be useful.

From that, it is notable that, even for our membership, there is not a consistent local authority venue approach. It feels like local authorities are almost a bolted-on part of the sector, because they have a slightly different context and slightly different operations. That might be true in terms of how local authorities operate, but it is not true in terms of the audience experience. Audiences will happily go to the King's or Tron theatres or to their local authority venue. Likewise, artists who are looking to tour a piece of work, do a bit of development or rehearse a piece work through all those different systems.

We have set up a bit of a false separation in the ecosystem, and it feels as if the local authorities are missing from the thinking about the issue. Our venue members, and even some of the non-venue members, have ties with initiatives at local authority level. In times gone past, some venues would get direct support to help them to carry on their work. A lot of that has shifted towards more outcome and project-based funding, which has changed the nature of what they need to run the buildings at a time when costs are increasing.

All the individual artists and organisations that are involved, as well as the venues, which want to be the hubs for their areas, are committed to place-based approaches. They would back the calls from the youth work sector—I have a youth work background, too—to reverse the closure of spaces and to have places for young people or other generations to come together and build connections, and to have other activities that help them on their pathway for the future, whether it be a career or a civic role. The venues want to be, and can be, that space, but it becomes harder when they are trying to preserve staff and keep things open.

Veronique A A Lapeyre: The local authorities are an important part of the picture. It has been great to see the Culture Counts spending tracker and to be able to understand the real-time underspend and how it has affected visual arts and contemporary art provision. Many of our member organisations rely on support from local authorities as part of their funding mix, and that has been increasingly challenging. We have seen year-on-year evaluations and reviews. When councils have to make reductions in their budget, culture and visual arts are very much the first thing that is reviewed, and it is difficult to have to make the case year on year.

An interesting thing that we are seeing at SCAN is that, when arts organisations or artist-led organisations are taking over properties that are run by local councils, there are different ways of engaging with the culture sector in different departments. The commercial elements of councils are affecting the rates that organisations are charged. The rates increases are coming faster than organisations can budget or fundraise for, which has become a real issue.

On top of that, as many witnesses have mentioned, there are the issues with the cultural estate that the local authorities look after, which is perhaps not dilapidated but is needing a spruce, new infrastructure and money spent on it. Many organisations are struggling to adapt to climate change and to make their venues accessible, which is affecting audiences and longevity. That goes to show that there is a lack of joined-up thinking and forums to get together.

For example, we have seen that with Trongate 103, where different elements of the council, or arm's-length organisations that are linked to the council, had competing or differing views about how to treat things. Fiona Campbell mentioned community buyouts. Lots of visual arts organisations and collectives want to take on more community buyouts, but there is a lack of long-term funding and support. People are not sure how to go about that, and the processes can be quite vague, which we are seeing with the CCA as well. The will is there for arts organisations to take on the venues and to make towns, villages and cities a vibrant and thriving place to be, but the infrastructure and support are waning.

Jenny Young: That is helpful. Community buyout and asset transfer are often put on the table as an alternative but, as you say, it can be challenging for organisations that are already stretched too thin and are concentrating on what they normally do to get together a business case and all the rest of it. I have heard that locally.

Before we move to my colleagues, I want to speak to Fiona Campbell about the national performing companies. Earlier, we heard from our colleague from the National Theatre of Scotland about the funding challenges for the existing five national performing companies, but the Government has now committed to having a sixth, which will be for traditional music. Fiona, could you say a little about whether that is needed and, if so,

why? What would be the positive impacts for the people who you represent?

Fiona Campbell: I had a feeling that I might be asked that question—I do not know why. To be honest, the TMSA is still formulating our response to the consultation on that, which closes tomorrow. The consultation period has been very short, which has not allowed us to get to the people who are not so digitally enabled. Also, as a voluntary organisation that is pretty much run on voluntary effort, we have a lot of demands on our time.

I will throw that back at you a bit. We have heard from a number of people, so I will be voicing concerns and views that we have heard from across the sector. People do not know why that was in the manifesto, to be honest—that was a common comment. We do not know where it came from. The idea has been mentioned fairly regularly in the past few decades, but I am surprised that, in the survey, there was no question asking, "Do you think that there should be a traditional music performing company?" in order to clarify whether there is definitely a demand, need and interest.

As with other big questions that people have asked in the past, it is not clear what the intention is. We appreciate the recognition and the idea of having something of national significance, because, recently and in the past, traditional and folk arts have felt like a poor cousin to most of the other genres. We know, however, that those arts are actually a key, fundamental and vital part of many Scottish communities and our cultural heritage. It is not that we are saying no; we are just giving a bit of a yes/no/maybe, because it depends on what the company is wanted for.

This is strange, but I recently heard a radio programme about the Hunan national music performing group from China, which went into how the group works in the community to pass on traditions. Those are local Hunan province traditions rather than general Chinese cultural heritage. That group has a clear idea of what it is doing. A clear idea needs to be identified for the proposal here before some people will say yes to it. Other people are saying no, because they feel that traditional folk arts are from the folk—they are meant to start from the bottom up and not be imposed from the top down.

Is the proposal for a big supergroup of people? I do not know whether you remember the Unusual Suspects, which was a great big folk band. That was a bottom-up collation of people and, in the late 2000s, we proposed to work with them on the trad tour, but that idea was squashed. The appetite has been there in the past for a bottom-up approach.

Alternatively, would it be like the National Theatre of Scotland? When that was consulted on, there was a strong push for it to be a commissioning or convening company and not to become a separate company that imposed on top of other theatre companies.

Is it the idea of brokerage or something like an export music agency? That is one thing that people have mooted as needing to happen. A lot of people are taking the traditional arts out of Scotland, and we know about the Scottish diaspora. I am from New Zealand so, believe me, I know about the Scottish diaspora—I grew up in it. There are a lot of pipe bands, Scottish country dancing, Highland dancing and other Scottish activities out there in the world already. We are probably one of the best branded countries in the world, for lack of a better way of putting it, through our traditional arts, but people do not recognise that because a lot of it is voluntary and happens at the grass roots.

I have been to folk dance festivals to represent Scotland through traditional dance, and the question is: will the new company potentially cut into the resources of other national performing companies? Will it cut into the resources of people who already do the work of highlighting, supporting and promoting? Will it get in the way? I am not being negative; I am saying that that is what happens when a new idea comes along.

It is not that we do not like the idea of promotion or recognition; the issue is how and why it is done and how it is resourced. It actually almost feels like it needed to be talked about before it was created. It feels like it has become, "This is going to happen," rather than, "How is it going to happen, and how is it best done?"

Another thing that some people are considering is whether the system should be like it is in many of the Scandinavian countries, where there is a big programme of traditional artists working in schools. At the moment, our approach is a bit haphazard. It often depends on whether you have a local face who might be working with the school. Could we have it so that every school had access to a traditional artist? Perhaps there could be two or three—let us splurge on it. Joseph Peach, who was on the previous panel, talked about his experience of having people from the traditional arts in schools. It is really important.

This idea could be about so many things. We would probably say yes to your question, but with an "if". That is only the start of things.

Jenny Young: That is really helpful. It would be interesting to see your response and those from other organisations to the consultation. Clearly, there is more work to be done.

Pauline Stafford: I will just pick up on Jenny Young's point about spaces and local authority funding. My questions will be mostly for Mr McGlashan.

Your submission said that you

"welcome innovative policies such as the pilot of a Minimum Income"

but that there is a "basic need for spaces" where art is performed.

Could you give us an idea of where the gaps are at the moment and then touch on what you think the opportunities in the area of public sector reform might be, as well as how we think about where culture takes place and how we could approach that creatively?

Kenny McGlashan: It is really about making best use of the available assets, but we must also consider what makes doing that harder for organisations. You have seen organisations across the multiyear funding portfolio, as well as the National Theatre of Scotland and others, make desk spaces and rehearsal rooms available.

There are models to develop that approach. The organisation Edinburgh Performing Arts Development has helped to collate available rehearsal rooms and workshop spaces, and has helped people to find them and match them with their needs. Such models have been piloted and tested, and we are looking at how they can reach people. Underpinning that is the need to ensure that those organisations are not struggling to keep things open or to resource some of those things. There are opportunities to build on those models, and that is one of the potential efficiencies. If attention were paid to building capacity to put such models in place, more of them would happen. We keep returning to a theme about building an ecosystem, providing stable funding and doing the groundwork to allow people to do those things. That commitment, that ability and those opportunities need to be there to deliver those benefits.

We need to give attention to the specific thing that we mentioned in our evidence: minimum income for artists. Producing and touring is a good example of what flows through the sector. Providing minimum income to support an artist is welcome, and it will address issues that have been present for freelancers in the sector. There is also the production of work, which Culture Counts is calling for in its evidence. Beyond that, where does that work go, and how does that work then find a place to be rehearsed and developed in partnership with a venue? How does it then get taken on and programmed? Do they have the audience for it, and how do they build that audience over subsequent years?

There is a whole ecosystem to consider. Ensuring that there is investment in the infrastructure of venues and spaces, and that they are not falling away while we invest in another area, is just as important.

11:30

Alasdair Nicolson: I will come in on the venues idea. As someone who works somewhere where there are not really any venues, we have to make a virtue out of what we have. It also means that we have to make a sterling effort to transform any given venue—and there are many of them during a festival—into a usable space.

I will make an important point in relation to the national performing companies and the wider view of touring in terms of venues and the offer. A lot of people come to me as a festival in June, and that is the only time that they want to come into the Orkney Islands, because we have created an infrastructure, venues and the means, if you like, to put on a show. At the moment, rather than talking about closing down venues, as some of my colleagues have been doing, there is, ironically enough, a working party on the idea of creating a new space.

It is important to note that the infrastructure that people would sometimes need to bring into a rural environment puts them off coming there at all, particularly the national performing companies, who want that to be there for them. They are perhaps put off because there is nothing. That is an important aspect of the job that I do, which is not only producing a festival, to some extent, bringing in Orkney's arts provision—albeit that it is once a year.

Pauline Stafford: Thank you for that perspective. It is helpful to see both sides of that picture and the challenges.

I will ask about areas where there might be only one venue that people look to for culture. In my constituency, for example, we have one theatre. Such venues were previously managed by local authorities as arm's-length organisations, such that there possibly was not the expertise that we really need to be running theatres; we need expertise in order to make those things work viably. We have seen that, when local authority budgets are under pressure, there is a short-term risk that we will lose those venues overnight, and we have to switch really quickly.

How do we get local authorities to think more strategically about the resilience of those places where people really look for their culture in an area? How do we avoid getting into the sort of short-term reactionary situation where people think, "We can't afford to lose this theatre, but we don't have the time to build that expertise?"

Kenny McGlashan: Some of that is about having leadership capacity and a joined-up approach.

We were aware of some of the situation around Cumbernauld theatre and, even prior to that,

various other things, such as Howden Park. Some of the past success of places such as Howden Park was about how they were key places that were connected into wider producing and touring activities, and into work in relation to young audiences and development of artists in the local area. All of those aspects are additional to the work of just keeping the thing running.

If the leaders are plugged into networks such as ours and meeting their peers, it means that they can exchange. It also makes things more efficient. That becomes harder to do when people are strained or cut back, or when they lose members of staff or there is turnover. It is about being aware that, although the ecosystem or context is changing within an organisation, it still requires to be plugged into those sorts of networks.

I have seen it work in different venues really well in the past; I have seen them tap into peers who want to collaborate and exchange, and the work flows through the system in all those different ways. However, the more that the margins get thinner, more pressure gets put on, everything gets exponentially harder and things stop happening. As a result, you end up with situations where things have to shift in the organisational model, or where there has to be those kind of short-term fixes.

To go back to the earlier reference to the counsel of doom, we recognise that, a lot of the time, we are talking about how things are challenging and what more is needed. However, that is partly because we see investment as something to help things grow and to make those impacts flourish and extend, as opposed to letting things grind to a halt and become problems—which also require investment.

Keith Brown: I am struck by some of the comments that Fiona Campbell made about—I am paraphrasing—endless strategies and plans and the time that is involved in considering them, which seems disproportionate to say the least when compared to the resources that you have to play with.

We have heard about joined-up working and collaboration. If we agreed to put more money into the national companies—not that it would be us; it would be the Government—that would be at the expense of the museums sector, whose representatives were on the previous panel also asking for more money. There is a finite level of money and, incidentally, I do not think that that will change. It will only get worse for the budgetary reasons that I mentioned before—for example, look at what has happened to the Scottish Government's capital budget over the past 10 years.

Given that context, realising the resources that are available, would it be worth the sector coming together to make a joint approach to the Government or is that completely impracticable? Would it just end up with everyone getting a little more and not addressing some of the issues? Is there any scope for that? I have been on the committee for a few years now and, every year, I see panels of witnesses with everybody making their pitch for more resources, which can often only be done at the expense of others. Would there be benefit in the sector as a whole making a proposal to the Government for how it would like funding to be distributed?

I will go to Fiona Campbell first, as I mentioned her.

Fiona Campbell: I am on the spot now.

The TMSA is a membership organisation and most of our activity is at a local level. I point to Keith festival and Kirriemuir festival. Kirrie is the grandchild of our original festival in Blairgowrie. It moved to Kinross and then to Kirrie.

We talked about venues. There are no great venues in many places, but the festivals have made venues work for them, a bit like what has happened in Orkney. You go to the guide hall in Kirrie or the Ploo inn in Keith—it can just be a couple of pubs. The organisers have made do with what is there but have made vibrant festivals that benefit the towns. I remember sitting in a restaurant in Keith once and the people there said, "Oh yeah, we make all our money at Keith festival." That shows the economic impact.

I know that I am slightly straying away from Keith Brown's question but although we might want it to be nicely neat—we want to pull people together and get one idea—I have found that, with voluntary arts, you have to let people do what they want to do. You cannot force volunteers to do something that they are not interested in or do not have a passion for.

I would love to be in a position to pull the whole traditional music sector together—we have the traditional music forum, for example—but I think that actually we need to support people in doing what they want to do. That is not always about money; it has often been about recognition or ensuring that there is a venue. Sometimes, you do not need that much funding. The witness from Museums Galleries Scotland mentioned its smaller funds, and we have a traditional arts fund that is going great guns. It does not have a lot of money to distribute, but it could distribute more. It has a low-impact application form.

It is not always about the big ideas; sometimes, it is about making sure that a lot of smaller ideas work together. That means that you get the local

aspect and what people want in the community. That is the strength of any part of the sector. If you have the foundations, you can maintain the top of the mountain, if you see what I mean. You do not have a mountain floating by itself—just a peak of excellence. Maintaining the foundations is the important thing, so I suggest that the big idea is to support the grass roots. That will support the national performing companies because they need people to come from somewhere and a lot of them come from the grass roots.

As to how to carve up the pie, perhaps we could consider some of the issues that came up about commercialisation. Many voluntary organisations do not have public sector funding. They maintain their work by ticket sales. I have seen some venues around the country that could do better on maximising the commercial opportunities that come their way from touring productions. I have been in a couple of venues where there was no promotion of the theatre show at all. In one, it was a tick-box exercise for the venue because it was a black and minority ethnic theatre company, and more people could have come to the show if more had been done to promote it.

There is an element of ensuring that subsidy is leveraged properly. I do not think that some of the organisations that we met were doing that. The best promotion work that we saw came from an organisation that had a little bit of funding but was mainly run by volunteers. It really pulled out all the stops. I am simply saying that, unfortunately, subsidy does not always equate to effective leverage.

I do not want to name names, because I do not want to embarrass anyone, although I think that the management in the case I mentioned has moved on, which is good. Sometimes, however—perhaps because they are stretched and the elastic band is tight—people cannot see where the opportunities are and are not leveraging their subsidy as well as they could be. Perhaps support could be provided in that area. Better use of social media might have helped—we were not telling them how to use social media.

That is one element. There are perhaps challenges relating to a lack of skills, knowledge, experience or confidence in the product—maybe someone did not feel that the production was going to be successful, but it turned out to be a brilliant thing.

Veronique A A Lapeyre: It is a great question. I agree with some of what Fiona Campbell said and disagree with other aspects. Why do we not collectively get together and give you a proposal? As you have seen from the fact that many of our submissions reference similar objectives and aims, we do get together to discuss how we think the culture sector could best be supported.

We all have our own arenas and our own members. SCAN represents artists and arts organisations, and our role is to advocate for and champion them. We are highlighting different issues and challenges. However, the reason why we cannot come to the Scottish Government with a collective ask is that the issue extends beyond the Scottish Government and involves, for example, local authorities, universities, schools and the health sector. We want to work across portfolios and cross-sectorally. I suppose that, by asking for slightly different things, we are demonstrating the breadth and the range of the ecosystem.

I totally agree with Fiona Campbell's point that it is not a neat ecosystem. We want to support people to deliver their own ambitions, whether that is an artist who wants to develop their practice and put on their own exhibition in a space that they have chosen and in a way that they have chosen, working with their peers and colleagues whom they have selected, or an arts organisation that wants to bring someone in from overseas to put on an exhibition or to undertake a project and is working across partnerships.

Different people want to do different things. We are here to help those ambitions to flourish. We need the Scottish Government to be a really strong partner and advocate for a cross-portfolio approach to culture, but also to bring all those other decision makers to the table so that they fully understand how we can invest in culture.

I have worked in this sector for about 18 years now. It is not an easy or simple thing to sum up. There are many different parts to it, and they are all valid. I also appreciate the point that it should be recognised that we do a lot with our subsidy. We do more than some people might believe. The outcomes that we achieve in health, education, social inclusion and creative expression are off the charts.

It was mentioned that the subsidy needs to be leveraged. We already have lots of people pulling lots of levers. What we need is specific funding to help further the aims that the policy seeks to achieve. We need different development funds. A lot of the organisations that SCAN supports are part of Creative Scotland's multiyear funding portfolio. It is amazing that there has been an uplift in funding. However, many organisations did not receive the amount that they needed. Indeed, most organisations did not even ask for the amount that they needed.

We have also seen rising costs across the board that organisations must deal with. They are doing a lot with what they have, but if there were

additional support for capital development, creating accessible spaces and community buyouts, we could develop the policy further and get closer to what that ambitious picture looks like.

11:45

Keith Brown: In previous years, many people from the sector have advocated that the committee should put pressure on the Scottish Government to allow cultural and arts organisations to take part in meetings relating to other portfolios. I have not heard that today, but I think that Veronique was hinting at it.

I come back to my question about whether there is any way in which the sector could come together to make a joint approach to the Government. For example, it could decide that, this year, it should concentrate on the basics—building up facilities—even if that meant that it would have to forgo other things. Is there no scope for the sector to make a joint approach to the Government? I appreciate that other actors, such as schools, are involved, but is there any scope for that in relation to the Scottish Government's budget allocations?

Kenny McGlashan: Yes, I think there is. To build on what Veronique said, which I fully agree with, the scope already exists for that, given what the Government is doing. The work that was done on the culture strategy and the action plan refresh offers exactly that opportunity.

The reason why the sector cannot make a joint approach is that we have a system that is so spread out and that operates in so many different ways that it involves many different perspectives and ways of operating. There is such a diversity of opinion. In the same way that SCAN does, we represent freelancers, producing organisations, venues and national organisations, which can all have four or five opinions on one issue. Part of our role is to help to bring some of those views together. That is the picture just in theatre and the performing arts. We cannot all sit down and come to one conclusion because of that diversity and all those different elements.

The culture strategy and the action plan refresh were followed by the publication of the independent review of Creative Scotland. We have had an election and a new programme for government, so we now have an opportunity to look back. It is not a reset: through the action plan refresh, a lot of progress has been made in relation to resilience, skills, data, collaboration and the role of culture across Government, and we need to continue that progress.

All the individual organisations operate in a system that is partly collaborative and partly competitive. We created the system in which we operate. We need to think about how we can move to a position in which we have a sector plan with a clear message. We must be honest about the fact that that will involve prioritising one thing over another. Some things will be funded while others will not. It will be a difficult conversation. That needs to be facilitated and committed to.

What I hear, certainly from our members, is that people are committed to that. They are trying to do that at a low level in their own organisations, but there is a need for a more strategic approach. We have had the culture strategy, the action plan refresh, the independent review of Creative Scotland and the new programme for government. We now need to create a manageable number of long-term priorities and metrics and to identify clearly who will act on those priorities. We need to bring in local government and the voluntary sector, as well as looking at what opportunities there are for investment and for making more capital gains out of what is produced. We need information on when that will happen, what resources will be used and how progress will be measured.

We will then have a rationale for saying, "We're going to prioritise this for this period of time, so that we can get to this place, and then we'll prioritise something else." At the moment, we do not have that. When people's roofs leak, they have to wait for an emergency fund that they can apply to. They are not able to think, "I know this problem will come up in 10 years' time—this is how I'll plan for it." The organisations and businesses in the sector are trying to do that, but they have not been given the motivation, either by the Government or by funders, to implement such a joint long-term plan.

Alasdair Nicolson: The word "sector" is a tricky one, because there are many sectors within the culture sector. Everyone has alluded to the fact that we all work together in the same environment and with the same goals—putting people on stage, putting work on walls, publishing books and creating new things in the arts—but that is done in many and various ways.

As Kenny McGlashan says, there is competition as much as there is collaboration sometimes, and I think that, for that reason, it is difficult to lump everything into one conduit and say that that is the answer to everything. We all work together a lot but we perhaps have different ideas about what would be the golden ticket to improving our lives, and I am not sure that we would all agree on that in the end.

In terms of the situation in the north, finding consistent funding is of fundamental importance, and it would worry me hugely if there was a notion that we should shoot off in one direction because that seemed to be the thing to concentrate on. I fear that, in that context, we might lose a lot that needs to carry on and continue. I would not

advocate prioritising anything, particularly by virtue of what people might suggest is a good idea, because there is a danger within that that things would get lost and literally disappear.

The sector requires a consistency of input, funding and, importantly, trust. That is a big word that is not often used in circumstances in which we are all working against the clock and against the financial odds and so on. However, we fundamentally need to feel that we are trusted to get on and deliver what we know we can deliver. There has sometimes been a sense that we are under scrutiny and have to meet targets and so on, which can create a sense of having your homework marked rather than of being encouraged to do something wonderful.

We have a tremendous art sector in Scotland, which travels across the world. The most important thing is that we should not get caught up in where we can send the money; instead, we should ensure that the money and support are consistent, so that we do not lose elements of what is being done and can develop stuff that is being done at the grass-roots level. That will enable us to develop stuff from the grass-roots—that is absolutely important.

It is also essential that we can offer opportunities to create new work. One of the most problematic things for me in recent times has been the making of new work. There is not a great deal of money around that enables someone simply to commission creatives to do the thing that they do, be it paint a picture, write a play, write some music or whatever. That is a diminishing world and yet it is fundamental. Of course, I speak with a vested interest as a composer as well as a festival director, but I am passionate about the fact that creativity—not just performances on stage and so on—is something that needs to be invested in, because that is the future and will be the history.

Keith Brown: Because we are short of time, I will not ask my second question, which was going to be on that idea of travelling around the world and the impact of Brexit on the sector. I am very pleased that Fiona Campbell mentioned Covid in that regard, because that is a huge influence that we do not pay enough attention to.

The Convener: Three more members have yet to come in, and I would not mind a final question at the end, so I encourage everyone to be reasonably tight with questions and responses. Also, we will probably not be able to hear from every witness on every question.

David Green: Thank you for the evidence that we have heard this morning. I was going to go around the room and tell you what I thought of it all, but we have not got time. However, it has been very helpful.

Kenny McGlashan, you say that you are looking for funding settlements in the budget that properly reflect the cost of fair work, equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives and environmental investment, because those things will become more difficult to deliver when funding is limited. I would like to give you the opportunity to unpack for us, and, indeed, ministers who are listening, exactly what those challenges look like and to say something about the urgency that exists with regard to the next financial year.

Kenny McGlashan: Our ask is really about the awareness that the significant commitments that have been made must be there in the long term. They must be present in the budgets for next year and the year after if we are to make a real dent in some of these bigger issues. On equalities, all the evidence shows us that attracting new communities and new audiences to see our work involves several years' work. It is about having connections and partnerships with people who are already in those communities, programming different types of work and supporting access in various ways, as well as, of course, any EDI changes that you want to make in your own organisation and changes to the accessibility of the venue. A huge amount of things are involved, so it goes back to the fact that it is easy to make a commitment, but you must also think about what that commitment costs in both capacity and investment.

The same thing applies in terms of the environment. We welcome the commitment to the capital investment fund, both from the Scottish Government and from Creative Scotland, but we want to know how the consultation on that is going to work, how the venues can influence it, what is it likely to cover and whether it will cover all the relevant aspects, and not just projects and initiatives. There is a huge amount of stuff in there, and action is needed right now because, as you have heard previously, buildings are leaking.

The commitments that have been made, including on fair work—and we have not even touched on the culture fair work task force—are important and our members are all behind them, but they want to see them implemented in the real world. They do not want to promise something to their audiences, their artists and their staff and then not deliver on that. We want there to be an appreciation of the fact that adding those areas of focus has a significant impact on budgets and planning.

David Green: Thank you, Kenny.

Alasdair Nicolson, I listened to your evidence with real interest. Earlier, you said that, too often, policy drives activity. Could you illustrate that for

me? What did you mean by that? What change of direction might you be suggesting in that regard?

Alasdair Nicolson: What I am alluding to is that we have a strong set of commitments to fair work first, to EDI, to climate initiatives and so on. We are engaged in and committed to those issues anyway in what we do. However, sometimes, the commitment leads to a lot of reporting and work that surrounds the idea of delivery, if that makes sense. In a small organisation with a team of three part-timers that is creating a big international festival in any given year, you begin to struggle when something demands more reporting, analysis, statistics collection and so on—you struggle not with the idea of it philosophically but with the practicality. You ask yourself whether, given that something is not a heavy commitment to make, there should be such a heavy demand to go to such extents to prove what is being done.

Also, I am not trying to create a divide between the rural and the urban, but I would point out that some of the priority areas that are raised are slightly more tricky to deliver and more nuanced when applied to an island or a rural situation—they can be almost impossible to deliver, or, at least, it can be tricky to work out how to deliver them. Perhaps the priorities that people understand on a fundamental level are slightly different in different contexts. I suppose that what I am saying is that there is a lot more nuance to some of the things that are set as top-line targets when it comes to delivery. There is no lack of commitment to those—I do not think that we would have that commitment without a request to deliver it. However, there is also a sense that you are being checked up on all the time, as if you are going to try your damnedest not to fulfil a commitment. Of course that is not the case: we are committed to delivering most things that we are asked to do anyway. As I said earlier, there must be an element of trust. We need to have a contract that allows us all to trust one another.

David Green: Thank you, Alasdair—that follows on from the picture that you painted of the difference between rural and island, and urban, settings. I represent a very rural constituency—we are the next-door neighbour to Orkney.

12:00

About 10 years ago, I used to work for the MSP for Orkney, Liam McArthur, so I would say that you are living in the second-best place in Scotland, next to my own constituency. At that time, we were, as a Parliament, heavily involved in passing the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. Liam McArthur has now called for the 2018 act to be reviewed, 10 years down the line; I believe that the Rural Affairs Committee will be looking at that. The idea is that there is an island impact assessment for any aspect of policy that Government puts forward, but also for spend. I have great interest in seeing how the 2018 act translates into rural proofing.

Has the 2018 act created any benefits—or otherwise, if it has been ineffective—with regard to culture budget spend?

Alasdair Nicolson: As far as I am aware to date, and as far as I am involved, not a huge amount has filtered through at all, and nothing in particular has changed in the artistic landscape, certainly in Orkney. We continue to do what we have always done and nothing has changed in that respect.

There is current manoeuvring afoot amid various groups that are getting together to try to channel joint energies to get some infrastructure created, and some equipment, in Orkney. However, I do not think that anything has significantly changed at all, or anything like, as a result of the 2018 act. We continue to do what we do in the context that we have done it for the past 10 years, and not much has been added to that.

With regard to the local council, we are still where we were on grant funding and so on, perhaps not 10 years ago but quite a few years ago, so nothing has changed there.

The Convener: Are there more questions? Senga, do you have a question?

Senga Beresford: I have one question for Fiona Campbell. Do you think that the new traditional music company should be based outside the central belt and, if so, where?

Fiona Campbell: I have no problem with that. There are many beautiful areas of Scotland where people would love to live and work if they could.

Again, it comes down to what the company might be doing. If it ends up being about getting everyone in one place, practising and then going out as a group of musicians, singers and maybe—I hope—dancers, that will require a base, which could be an economic benefit for an area. However, if it is going to be a more devolved structure that is about convening and commissioning people and bringing in people from all over—for example, do we need to highlight the different traditions throughout the country, from Shetland down to the Borders and across the way as well?—that might be a bit different.

Nevertheless, I would definitely support that suggestion, if it is possible. Our organisation has a national office in Edinburgh, but that is partly because that is where I am currently based. We have branches in other parts of the country, including in rural areas, and we have activity that happens in rural areas—for example, the Glasgow branch runs something in Oban.

I would point out one issue. The idea of better employment prospects for artists would be a key driver, and that includes all the freelancers and self-employed contractors. I spoke to one person who is struggling to find work; he is not quite in mid-career, but somewhere between early and mid-career, and he is finding it difficult to get work. The idea of having a programme of getting everyone in schools, adult learning projects and things like that could help people to get work.

Senga Beresford: It is quite difficult to say what success would look like in five years, without knowing what the contents are.

Fiona Campbell: We ran sessions for young people with the idea that they could build local sessions where they were in the country. It is all very possible—that is the beauty of traditional folk; it comes from the people.

Senga Beresford: If you had the choice, would you have seen that new company created or the money going into existing companies?

Fiona Campbell: Wow, that is a big question. I know that that kind of budget would fund the TMSA for 10 years at least. It comes down to what the benefits will be. For example, the TMSA could get a commission from the company to produce a concert, as we did in Perth in August, where we brought together our patrons and some younger singers—a big highlights concert that shows the value of old and new approaches. We are not saying no and we are not saying yes. It is a "maybe" at the moment.

The Convener: I note that you have not yet published your response to the consultation.

Fiona Campbell: We have not, and I did not write a paper, because I have lots of other things on as well.

The Convener: We will keep our eyes peeled for your response when it is available.

Fiona Campbell: There should be an open tender to run the company, and one of the criteria could be that it must be outside the central belt, for example.

The Convener: Kenny, I think that you want to comment.

Kenny McGlashan: Yes. Fiona Campbell said that we should learn from the past, and I note that the National Theatre of Scotland recently celebrated its 10th birthday. Is that correct? [*Interruption*.] I am told that it recently celebrated its 20th birthday. Sorry—I am older than I thought I was. The theatre without walls model came about through a lot of consultation work with our members. The Federation of Scottish Theatre is 50 years old this year. When the National Theatre of Scotland was proposed, the idea was welcomed, because many of our members had called for such a company, but there was also an immediate concern about what kind of company it would be and what impact it would have. The idea of not having a building was one of the key things. That might not be right for the company that we are discussing, but that joint work led to the setting up of an innovative national theatre model with a collaborative approach that has been celebrated internationally.

I do not want to put words into the mouths of Liam Sinclair and the National Theatre of Scotland, but I am sure that they would recognise that the company has also had an influence on how the touring sector works. There can be benefits from learning from the past 20 years of that process, because it shows what works, what is transferable and what ripple effects can be capitalised on, but also what to try to avoid.

Colin Beattie: Social inclusion was touched on earlier, and we talked about the fact that the number of people attending events has dropped. In some areas, the number of participants has dropped significantly. Some statistics in the Scottish household survey indicate that there has been a substantial drop in the number of disabled people attending—more than among able-bodied people, let us say. There has also been a substantial drop in the number of people from the most deprived areas attending. How can we address that? Alasdair, do you have any ideas on that?

Alasdair Nicolson: I can give ideas, but it is difficult for me to approach that question because our ticket sales are high and, demographically, our attendance is large across the piece. We are obviously still doing something right after 50 years—as we have talked about birthdays, I note that our festival was also 50 this year.

Addressing those issues is difficult. It is correct to say that Covid has had a long reach, and it changed the dynamic of people coming out and going to performances and all the rest of it. We now have to work much harder. In that regard, being in a rural environment probably puts us on the fortunate side. There is not so much happening in rural places so, when something is happening, it is more significant, and people make the effort to go along. Generally speaking, that is unusual, in that people otherwise have to leave their island or rural area to go and see something in Glasgow, Edinburgh or further afield.

What we can do is a tricky question, because it is about what is on offer and how easy it is for people to get there and experience it. Fundamentally, it is also about the price that we ask people to pay for tickets. Our average ticket price is £19.

Perhaps that is why we do rather well at the box office, because if I put ticket prices much higher, I get quite a lot of feedback, most of it negative. Perhaps it is about pricing to the right pocket these days, because we all know that we are squeezed and that the price of everything is going up, so perhaps the things that you forgo are those that you can least afford, which is what arts and culture, whether that is going to performances, galleries or whatever, can seem to be.

I do not have a golden answer that will solve the problem, but one has to look at it from so many angles in order to consider what people want. Can they get their accessible ticket? When they do, is what is being offered comfortable? Can they afford it? You must consider all those questions when working out what to offer.

Colin Beattie: Is it about money, Kenny?

Kenny McGlashan: You asked about audiences and recovery, so I want to touch on something that I briefly mentioned earlier. One thing that we have done this year is bring together venue members to share their audience data, which the systems that are currently in place do not require them to share with one another. It is only through organisations such as ours, because of the trust that we have built up, that they are willing to share that information, so that they can understand what their audiences look like across different regions, within different parts of programmes and across the country.

What are the lessons? To touch on what was mentioned earlier, there has been a recovery. Because our members are sharing information, we are able to look at their audience data and see how the trends have changed from before Covid, through the Covid period and the rebuild, to where we are now. That has shown us that we have built back to about 90 per cent of where we were pre-Covid, as have a lot of the venue members. That is not the full picture for venues across Scotland, but it is the case for our venue members.

Over that time, our members have balanced the ticket yield with an awareness of the cost of living pressures. If they increase prices significantly, it will further impact access. It is a good sign that people are coming back, and there is an opportunity for venues to work more effectively and strategically together to swap audiences. They do not need to be in competition, although they might have felt that they were in the past. Wee things such as sharing audience data can help.

However, the 2025 figures show that, in the past year, there has been a plateau, which is probably for a number of reasons. It possibly has to do with the cost of living, but it could also be to do with funding uncertainty, delays and their impact. It is a concern, and we are watching it, because there had been growth, but it plateaued towards the end. That gap might not seem like a lot, but it means that there are fewer productions, fewer people coming through the doors, less impact, less income being generated and a reduction in the associated funding and sponsorship as well as in the income generated through bars, the local economy and so on. There is a picture of how we can build back those audiences.

Coupled with that, we have for many years run a programme called Access Scottish Theatre in partnership with Birds of Paradise Theatre Company, which is a disability-led company. It provides a single place where people can find information about accessible performances in lots of different forms across the country. However, it needs significant investment to update it, make it more efficient for people to use, enable more of a conversation with audiences and bring it up to date. There are also other schemes out there. A new All In access scheme has also been introduced across the four UK nations. That could be a fantastic scheme, but it will require significant investment, not only in the new scheme itself but in organisations to enable them to make those services available.

There is already a lot of awareness about accessibility and a lot of attention and work in that area, but we need to support that collaborative working, those initiatives and the investment that is required to unlock that potential. It is not only about giving money to deliver a project; it is about unlocking additional sources of income, including from disabled and other audiences, and enabling them to take part and engage in all those things.

Colin Beattie: I am cognisant of time, but I will briefly ask either Fiona Campbell or Veronique Lapeyre to answer the same question, which is on social exclusion.

12:15

Veronique A A Lapeyre: Social inclusion is an important area in which the visual arts are doing significant work and have a lot of great examples of best practice and progressive approaches. I was just thinking about Gaada, in Shetland, which is an artist-led social enterprise that has built a world-class accessible workshop. Gaada routinely works with audiences who want to pursue their creative interests, and it particularly focuses on working with disabled and neurodivergent artists. There are lots of other such examples among SCAN's membership.

The long tail of Covid is definitely a challenge for art organisations or artists who want to have a participatory practice or to put on community workshops. To this day, some organisations put on Covid-safe workshops and events, which is really

positive. However, transport is a massive issue. I am sure that your parliamentary colleagues are talking about this in other committees, but the lack of accessible and regular transport in rural areas, and even in areas such as Fife, where I am from, and the central belt, is a challenge when it comes to getting participants to the venues, whether they are just down the road or a little bit further afield. Addressing that requires investment and cross-party working.

As we mentioned, additional funding is needed to make buildings more accessible. Particularly in Edinburgh, where I used to live, a lot of buildings are very difficult to make accessible because they are of a considerable age, which is a challenge. There are also new, different forms of accessibility in buildings. It is becoming a thing to have quiet spaces, sensory packs and so on for neurodivergent people. More provision to support better environments for all in buildings would be useful.

I also wanted to highlight that there has been a significant lack of funds for equalities, diversity, inclusion and access. We have seen a roll-back of such funding over the past five years, which has been a challenge. It is an area that is particularly near to my heart. There is no additional funding for organisations to take on staff who are trained in EDI or for specialists who work with special targeted groups. That has meant that some of the great work that was done during Covid has had to fall by the wayside as people have focused on their core issues or on their leaking roofs.

There has been a lot of talk about the box office and audiences, but a lot of visual and contemporary arts activity is free. It is free for community participants to access, free to walk into a gallery and free in terms of galleries putting on engagement and participatory activity. Investing in social inclusion is of real interest to the contemporary art world, and we will see further dividends from our work in civic life.

The Convener: I am afraid that we are really tight for time, and I feel utterly compelled to crowbar in one final question, which is to Veronique Lapeyre from SCAN.

You have repeatedly raised the challenges faced by Trongate 103 and the CCA, which are not only issues for Glasgow. It seems to me that we need, if we are going to have a thriving culture scene and access to culture, for physical premises not only to be of good quality and available but to cost significantly less than commercial rates and commercial rents. If we think back to when the CCA building was taken on by the Scottish Arts Council more than 50 years ago, it showed a sense of ambition from a national culture body that it should provide a space like that. Now, Creative Scotland does not want to be a landlord any more, and other parts of the public sector do not want to take on physical premises.

Do we need a new way of providing physical spaces in that way, or is it your view that we should push back against Creative Scotland and say, “No, providing spaces like this should be a core part of the national culture agency’s purpose”?

Veronique A A Lapeyre: Probably both. We perhaps need a new approach. As we put into our written submission, SCAN feels that we need a forum in which different landlords or commercial partners can come together to understand what that long-term ambition is, what that vision is for Scotland and what part they are playing in providing good creative spaces that are accessible, warm and fit for purpose and that allow lots of different kinds of activity to take place in them. We do need to see a different model. Otherwise, we will not lift ourselves out of this crisis moment, which requires long-term thinking.

It is not for me to say whether Creative Scotland wants to be a landlord or not. We have all collectively fed into the discussion about where we think the sector should go, because we did a lot of consultation on the independent review and a lot of consultation on the culture strategy. I think that it has come out in the review that we need a different model, and it has come through that the staff are specialists and are really amazing and passionate. Perhaps we should let them do what they do best.

If Creative Scotland does not want to be a landlord, that is fair enough. I understand that it can be a challenging role. However, we need to take a different approach to our arts and civics infrastructure and spaces and places that communities and people go to every day. The current approach is not working.

The Convener: Thank you all very much. I am sorry that we have overrun a little bit, and I am sure that we could have explored much more, but we are very grateful to all of you for sharing your time to join us and inform our work.

We will now suspend the meeting and move into private session.

12:21

Meeting continued in private until 12:30.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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